

THE IMAGERY OF THE SONG OF SONGS

by

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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I certify that the material contained within this dissertation is my own composition and that the contents reflect the results of my own research except where stated otherwise.

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ABSTRACT

The intention of this thesis is to classify the imagery of the Song of Songs, and to see how the images therein combine to give movement to the whole. A translation of the Song tests the findings of the analysis. It is accompanied by a discussion of rare words and textual cruxes. Four main chapters follow, containing the main body of the work. Images are examined under the broad categories of 'Courtly Imagery', 'Imagery Drawn from Family Life' and 'Nature Imagery', each of which subdivides into a number of sections. The way in which they combine is considered in the final chapter, 'Metaphors in Time and Space'. Among the conclusions of the study is the importance of imagery in the constitution of the unity of the Song; the variety of images illumines the themes of seeking and finding, longing and fulfilment from a number of different perspectives, whilst their homogeneity builds up a common language between the lovers. This deepening communion is both the subject and purpose of the Song.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AASOR	Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research
AJSL	American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature
ANESTP	J.B. Pritchard (ed.) Ancient Near East Supplementary Texts and Pictures
ANET	J.B. Pritchard (ed.) Ancient Near Eastern Texts
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AOS	American Oriental Series
ASTI	Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute
AV	Authorised Version
BDB	F. Brown, S.R. Driver and C.A. Briggs, Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament
BHS	Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia
Bib	Biblica
Cant. Rab	Midrash Rabbah to the Song of Songs
CBQ	Catholic Biblical Quarterly
ETL	Ephemerides theologicae lovanienses
Exped	Expedition
GHB	Grammaire de l'hébreu biblique
GKC	Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar
IB	Interpreter's Bible
IEJ	Israel Exploration Journal
Int	Interpretation
JB	Jerusalem Bible

JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JCS	Journal of Cuneiform Studies
JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
JSS	Journal of Semitic Studies
JTS	Journal of Theological Studies
KTU	Keilsalphabetische Texte aus Ugarit
LXX	Septuagint
m.	Mishna
MT	Masoretic Text
NEB	New English Bible
NIV	New International Version
PEQ	Palestine Exploration Quarterly
PG	Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Graeca. Ed. J-P Migne
PRU	Le Palais Royal d'Ugarit
RA	Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SSS	A Symposium on the Song of Songs
StTh	Studia Theologica
t.	Tosephta (followed by name of tractate)
UF	Ugarit Forschungen
Vg	Vulgate
VT	Vetus Testamentum
ZAW	Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
ZDMG	Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft

FOREWORD

The translation does not set out to either be authoritative or felicitous, but is intended to reflect and test the conclusions of the thesis. The section headings are functional only, identifying the broad changes of scene and speaker and should not be taken as implying adherence to any theory of the Song's provenance or structure. Throughout the thesis, the female protagonist is referred to as the beloved and the male protagonist as the lover.

TRANSLATION

- 1.1 Prologue The Song of Songs by Solomon.
- 1.2 Beloved O that he would kiss me,
with the kisses of his mouth,
for your embrace is better than wine,
1.3 the fragrance of your oils is pleasing,
your presence, streaming perfume;
that is why the maidens love you.
- 1.4 Draw me after you! Let us run!
Let the king bring me to his chambers!
In you we will rejoice and be glad,
we will praise your embrace more than wine.
How right they are to love you!
- 1.5 Black am I, yet beautiful, O daughters of Jerusalem,
like the tents of Kedar,
like the curtains of Solomon.

- 1.6 Do not stare at me because I am dark,
because the sun has scorched me.
My mother's sons were angry with me
and sent me to watch over the vineyards;
my own vineyard I did not tend!
- 1.7 Tell me, my true love,
where you graze your flock,
where you rest at noon,
for why should I go about like a harlot
among the flocks of your companions?
- 1.8 Lover If you do not know, O fairest of women,
go, follow the tracks of the sheep
and pasture your kids
by the shepherd's tents.
- 1.9 To a mare of Pharaoh's chariotry
I compare you, my love:
- 1.10 your cheeks, lovely between earrings,
your neck, through beaded collar.
- 1.11 We shall make for you, earrings of gold,
set with spangles of silver.

- 1.12 Beloved While the king lies on his couch,
my nard gives forth its fragrance.
- 1.13 My beloved is to me a sachet of myrrh,
between my breasts he takes his rest;
- 1.14 my beloved is to me a spray of henna blossom,
in the vineyards of Ein-Gedi.
- 1.15 Lover How beautiful you are, my love,
ah, how beautiful,
your eyes like doves!
- 1.16 Beloved How beautiful you are, my love,
and how handsome!
- Our couch is greened over;
- 1.17 the beams of our house, cedar,
are rafters, all of pine.
- 2.1 I am a flower of Sharon,
a water-lily growing in the valleys.
- 2.2 Lover Like a lily among thorns,
is my love among maidens.

- 2.3 Beloved Like an apricot tree among the trees of the forest,
is my beloved among young men.
With great delight I sat in his shade
and his fruit was sweet to my taste.
- 2.4 To the house of wine he led me
and his banner over me is love.
- 2.5 Sustain me with raisin cakes,
revive me with apricots,
for I am sick with love.
- 2.6 His left hand holds my head
and his right hand is round me!
- 2.7 I charge you, daughters of Jerusalem,
by the gazelles and hinds of the field;
do not arouse or awaken love
until it is ready.
- 2.8 The sound of my beloved! Here he comes,
bounding over the mountains,
leaping over the hills.
- 2.9 My beloved is like a gazelle
or a young stag.
There he stands behind our wall,
peering in at the windows,
gazing through the lattice.

- 2.10 My beloved spoke, saying to me;
 (lover) "Arise, my love
 my fair one, come away.
- 2.11 for see, the winter is past,
 the rains are over and gone;
- 2.12 the vines appear on the earth,
 the season of birdsong is come
 and the coo of the turtledove
 is heard in our land.
- 2.13 The fig tree sees its green fruits ripen
 and the vines are in blossom and full of fragrance.
 Arise, my love,
 my fair one, come away.
- 2.14 My dove, hidden in the crannies of the rock,
 in the secret places of the mountain steep,
 let me see your face,
 let me hear your voice;
 for your voice is sweet,
 your face is lovely."
- 2.15 Beloved Catch us the jackals, the little jackals
 that despoil the vineyards,
 for our vineyards are in bloom.

- 2.16 *Beloved* My beloved is mine and I am his,
he grazes among the water-lilies.
- 2.17 Until the day breathes
and the shadows flee,
Turn, my beloved, and flee like
a gazelle or a young stag
on the mountains of Bether.
- 3.1 Night after night on my bed
I sought my true love,
I sought him, but did not find him.
- 3.2 I said, "I will arise now and go the rounds of the city
through the streets and squares,
seeking my true love."
I sought him but could not find him.
- 3.3 The watchmen found me
as they made their rounds of the city.
"Have you seen my true love?"
- 3.4 Scarcely had I passed them
when I found my true love,
I held him, now I will not let him go
till I bring him to my mother's house,
to the chamber of her who conceived me.

- 3.5 I charge you, daughters of Jerusalem,
by the hinds and gazelles of the field;
Do not rouse or awaken love
until it is ready.
- 3.6 Narrator Who is this coming up from the wilderness
like a column of smoke,
perfumed with myrrh and frankincense,
with all kinds of merchant's powders ?
- 3.7 Look! It is the litter of Solomon;
sixty warriors escort it,
of the warriors of Israel,
- 3.8 all of them girt with swords,
all of them expert in war
each with his sword at his side
against the terrors of the night.
- 3.9 The King made a palanquin for himself,
Solomon made it out of wood from Lebanon.
- 3.10 Its posts he made of silver, its roof of gold,
Its seat of purple, its interior lovingly wrought.

3.10e-11

Daughters of Jerusalem, go forth!
Look, daughters of Zion!
upon Solomon the king
in the crown with which his mother
crowned him
on the day of his wedding,
the day of his gladness and joy.

4.1 Lover

How beautiful you are, my love,
how beautiful!
Your eyes are doves
behind your veil,
Your hair like a flock of goats,
moving down Mount Gilead.

4.2

Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes,
freshly come up from the washing,
all of them have twins,
none has lost a lamb.

4.3

Your lips are like a scarlet thread
and your mouth, lovely.
Your cheeks, like halves of a pomegranate
behind your veil.

4.4

Your neck is like David's tower
built in encircling courses;
a thousand shields hang upon it,
all of them the shields of warriors.

4.5

Your two breasts are like two fawns,
twin fawns of a gazelle
grazing among the water-lilies.

4.6

Until the day breathes
and the shadows flee,
I shall take myself to the mountain of myrrh
and to the hill of frankincense.

4.7

You are all fair my love,
fair without a flaw.

4.8

<Come> with me from Lebanon, my bride,
with me from Lebanon, come!
Hurry down from the heights of Amana,
from the summits of Senir and Hermon,
from the lion's lairs
and the hills where panthers prowl.

- 4.9 You have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride,
 you have stolen it,
 with just one of your glances,
 with one jewel of your necklace.
- 4.10 How fair is your love, my sister, my bride;
 your love is better than wine,
 your perfumes more fragrant than any spice.
- 4.11 Your lips drop sweetness like the honeycomb,
 my bride,
 honey and milk are under your tongue,
 and your dress has the scent of Lebanon.
- 4.12 A garden locked is my sister,
 my bride,
 a garden locked, a fountain sealed;
- 4.13 your shoots are an orchard of pomegranates,
 full of choice fruits,
- 4.14 of spikenard and saffron,
 aromatic cane and cinnamon,
 every kind of frankincense tree,
 myrrh and aloes,
 indeed every exquisite spice -

- 4.15 a garden fountain, a spring of living water,
 streams flowing down from Lebanon.
- 4.16 Beloved Awake, north wind, and come, south wind!
 Blow upon my garden,
 let its fragrance be spread abroad,
 that my beloved may come to his garden
 and eat its most choice fruit.
- 5.1 Lover I have come to my garden, my sister and bride
 I have gathered my myrrh and my spices,
 I have eaten my honeycomb and my honey,
 and drink my wine and my milk.
- Eat friends, and drink,
 till you are drunk with love!
- 5.2 Beloved I slept, but my heart was awake.
 Listen! My beloved is knocking
 "Open to me,
 my sister, my love,
 my dove, my perfect one,
 for my head is drenched with dew,
 my locks with the damp of the night."

- 5.3 "I had put off my robe,
how could I put it on again?
I had bathed my feet,
how could I dirty them?"
- 5.4 My beloved thrust his hand in through
the keyhole
and my heart turned over.
- 5.5 I arose to open to my love
and my hands dripped with myrrh,
my fingers ran with liquid myrrh
upon the handles of the latch.
- 5.6 I opened to my love,
but my love had turned and was gone.
I swooned at his flight.
- I sought him, but could not find him
I called, but there was no answer.
- 5.7 The watchmen found me,
as they made their rounds of the city.
They beat me, they wounded me,
the guards of the walls
stripped me of my cloak.

- 5.8 I charge you, daughters of Jerusalem,
if you find my love,
what you should tell him is this,
that I am sick with love.
- 5.9 Daughters of Jerusalem What is your beloved more than any other,
O fairest of women?
What is your beloved more than any other,
that you give us this charge?
- 5.10 Beloved My beloved is bright red,
outstanding among ten thousand.
- 5.11 His head is gold, finest gold.
His locks are like palm-fronds,
black as a raven.
- 5.12 His eyes are like doves
beside streams of water;
bathed in milk,
they sit steady, the river in spate.
- 5.13 His cheeks are like beds of spices
yielding fragrance,
his lips are water-lilies,
they drop liquid myrrh.

- 5.14 His arms are rods of gold,
 encrusted with jewels,
 his stomach is a bar of ivory,
 adorned with lapis lazuli.
- 5.15 His legs are marble pillars,
 set on bases of finest gold;
 his bearing is like Lebanon,
 noble as the cedar.
- 5.16 His mouth is sheer sweetness,
 wholly desirable.
 Such is my beloved, such is my love,
 O daughters of Jerusalem.
- 6.1 Daughters of Where has your beloved gone,
 Jerusalem O fairest of women?
 Which way did your beloved turn
 that we may seek him with you?
- 6.2 Beloved My beloved has gone down to his garden
 to the beds of spices,
 to graze in the gardens
 and to pick the water-lilies.

- 6.3 I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine;
he grazes his flock among the water-lilies.
- 6.4 Lover You are beautiful as Tirzah, my love
and lovely as Jerusalem,
awesome as an army with banners.
- 6.5 Turn your eyes away from me;
they dazzle me.
Your hair is like a flock of goats
moving down Mount Gilead;
- 6.6 Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes,
freshly come up from the washing,
all of them have twins,
none has lost a lamb.
- 6.7 Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate,
behind your veil.
- 6.8 There may be sixty queens and eighty concubines
and innumerable young women,
- 6.9 but one alone is my dove, my perfect one,
her mother's only one,
the favourite of her who bore her.
Maidens see her and call her blessed,
queens and concubines also, and they praise her.

- 6.10 Who is this that looks forth as the dawn,
lovely as the moon, radiant as the sun,
awesome as an army with banners?
- 6.11 Lover I made off down to the nut orchard
to see the new growth in the valleys,
to see if the vines had budded
or if the pomegranates were in flower.
- 6.12 Before I knew it, she set me
among the chariots of my people, as prince!
- 7.1 Male Chorus Come back, come back, O Shulamite
come back, come back, that we may gaze on you.
- Lover Why do you gaze upon the Shulamite
as upon a dancer before the camps?
- 7.2 How graceful are your sandalled feet,
O prince's daughter!
The curves of your thighs are like ornaments,
the work of a skilled hand.

- 7.3 Your navel is a rounded bowl,
 may it never lack spiced wine.
 Your belly is a heap of wheat,
 encircled by water-lilies.
- 7.4 Your two breasts are like two fawns,
 twin fawns of a gazelle.
- 7.5 Your neck is like an ivory tower.
 Your eyes are pools in Heshbon
 beside the gate of Bath - rabbim.
 Your nose is like a tower of Lebanon,
 looking towards Damascus.
- 7.6 Your head crowns you like Carmel
 your flowing locks have the sheen of purple;
 a king is caught in their movement.
- 7.7 How beautiful, how lovely you are,
 dear one, daughter of delights!
- 7.8 There you are, stately as a palm tree,
 your breasts like its clusters.
- 7.9 I said, 'let me climb the palm
 and grasp its fronds.'
 Oh, may your breasts be like clusters of the vine,
 your breath sweet-scented like apricots,

- 7.10a and your kisses like the best wine
- 7.10b Beloved flowing smoothly to my beloved,
- 7.10c Lover passing over my lips and teeth.
- 7.11 Beloved I am my beloved's, for me he longs;
- 7.12 come, my beloved, let us go out into the fields
 and lodge in the villages.
- 7.13 let us go early to the vineyards
 to see if the vines have budded
 and their blossom opened,
 and if the pomegranates are in flower.
 There I shall give you my love,
- 7.14 when the mandrakes are full of fragrance,
 and all choice fruits are over our door,
 fruits new and old,
 which I have in store for you, my love.
- 8.1 If only you were a brother to me,
 nursed at my mother's breast.
 Then if I met you outside, I could
 kiss you,
 and no-one would despise me.

- 8.2 I should lead you to my mother's house,
 and bring you to her
 who conceived me;
 I should give you spiced wine to drink
 and the juice of my pomegranates.
- 8.3 His left hand holds my head
 and his right hand is round me!
- 8.4 I charge you, daughters of Jerusalem,
 Would you arouse or stir up love,
 before it is ready?
- 8.5 Daughters of Who is this coming up from the wilderness,
 Jerusalem leaning on her beloved?
- Beloved Under the apricot tree I woke you,
 There your mother was in labour with you,
 there she who bore you, laboured.
- 8.6 Set me as a seal upon your heart,
 as a seal upon your arm,
 for love is strong as death,
 jealousy, relentless as the grave,
 its shafts, shafts of fire,
 more furious than any flame.

- 8.7 Mighty waters cannot quench love,
 no river can sweep it away;
 if someone were to offer for love,
 all the wealth of his house,
 he would be laughed to scorn.
- 8.8 "We have a little sister;
 she has no breasts.
 What shall we do for our sister,
 on the day she is spoken for?"
- 8.9 "If she is a wall,
 we shall build upon it a silver parapet;
 if she is a door,
 we shall board it up with a plank of cedar."
- 8.10 I am a wall, and my breasts are like towers;
 so in his eyes, I am one who brings peace.
- 8.11 Solomon has a vineyard at Baal-Hamon;
 he has given the vineyard over to keepers;
 each is to bring for its fruit
 a thousand pieces of silver.

8.12 The vineyard before me is mine,
 my very own,
 keep your thousand pieces, O Solomon,
 give those who guard its fruit, their two hundred.

8.13 Lover While you linger in the gardens
 my friends are waiting for your voice.
 Let me hear it too.

8.14 Beloved Quick, my love
 be like a gazelle
 or a young stag
 upon the mountains of spice.

NOTES TO THE TEXT

i RARE WORDS AND UNUSUAL FORMS

- 1:1 הַשִּׁיר הַיָּרֵךְ is superlative in meaning (GKC 133i), ‘the best of songs’. The form is comparable to הַכֶּלֶל הַלֵּל ‘vanity of vanities’ (Eccles 1:2). LXX and Vg understand the phrase thus. Others (eg. Ibn Ezra, Qimhi) understand the phrase to be partitive in meaning, ie. ‘one of Solomon’s songs’.

וְאֵל is the classical relative pronoun ‘which’. Throughout the rest of the Song the proclitic form וְ is used (1:6,12; 5:8; 6:5). The presence of the classical form in 1:1 is a strong argument for the lack of integrity of the verse. It substantiates the claim that 1:1 is a later addition which associates the Song with Solomon and the Wisdom tradition.

לְשֵׁלֹמֹה ascribes the work to Solomon, for the preposition לְ is also used to claim Davidic authorship for certain psalms (Ps 3:1; 4:1; 5:1). Other translations of the preposition לְ are possible, though less likely, ‘for/dedicated to Solomon’ or ‘about/concerning Solomon’.

- 1:2 רֶכֶּבְךָ has been translated by ‘your embrace’ even although the plural noun refers more precisely to lovemaking or to sexual acts (Prov 7:18; Ezek 23:17). As Fox (1985, 97) points out, the noun includes more than sexual intercourse. In 1:2 it refers to the lover’s kisses.

LXX translates יָרִיחַ here, and in 1:4, 4:10 and 7:13 by ‘breasts’, as does Peshitta in 4:10 and 7:13.

- 1:3 יָרִיחַ has been translated simply, ‘your fragrance’. The inseparable preposition לְ constitutes a dative of reference (GKC 143e).

תִּרְקַח is the third person feminine singular hophal imperfect of the root יָרַק, ‘to pour out’. In accordance with LXX *ekkenōten* and Vg *effusum*, I have rendered the form by ‘streaming’. The difficulty is that the feminine verbal form does not agree with the masculine noun מִשְׁחָ. Emendations have been proposed, the most popular of which is תִּרְקַח, the oil of purification referred to in Esth 2:3; 9:12. Gordis (1974, 78) points out that a number of nouns are ambivalent in gender.

- 1:4 מִשְׁכָּבִי is the masculine singular qal imperative of the root שָׁכַב, ‘to draw’, with the first person singular suffix. It is used of the drawing power of divine love in Hos 11:4 and in Jer 31:3.

יָבִי אֶנִּי has been translated by the Peshitta and Symmachus as if it were an imperative, ‘bring me’. One is thereby obliged to change the pronominal suffix of יָבִי from ‘his’ to ‘your’ chambers. The verb is more easily translated as a third person masculine singular hiphil perfect, ‘he brought me’ or as a precative perfect, ‘Let the king bring me’ (cf. Job 31:35). Read as a precative perfect (Davidson 1902, 63), the form corresponds to the jussive of 1:2, ‘O that he would kiss me’.

חַרְרִי translated by the singular ‘his chamber’ is most likely a plural of generalisation (GHB 136j).

מִי שְׂרִי ׀ אֶהְבֹּךְ has been translated in a variety of ways. LXX translates ‘righteousness loves you’, Vg ‘the upright love you’ and Peshitta ‘more than the upright, your love’. The phrase is an abstract adverbial accusative such as is found in Ps 58:2, 75:3 (GHB 126d).

- 1:6 מִי תִרְאֵנִי refers to the daughters of Jerusalem even although the second person masculine plural form is used (GHB 63150a).

רִי is used elsewhere only in Job (Job 20:9; 28:7) where the root means ‘to see’. A similar root רִי is used of the scorching wind in Gen 41:6,23,27. Murphy (1990, 126) points out that given the interchangeability of ר and ר in Aramaic, one can understand how רִי could be understood as meaning ‘to burn’.

- 1:9 לִסְסִי is characterised by an old genitive ending called the hireq compaginis (GHB 931). LXX, Peshitta and Vg understood it to be the first person pronominal suffix ‘my’. The archaic ending was possibly chosen so as to rhyme with the term of endearment רִי. Tenor and vehicle are thereby brought into relationship with each other even although they are estranged from each other at the beginning and end of 1:9.

כרכר is the masculine plural construct of כר, 'a chariot', preceded by the inseparable preposition כ. The difficulty is that the noun כר is most often used in the singular to denote a collective plural. The question has therefore been asked, how one mare could be linked up to several chariots? It seems likely that the answer lies in those plurals of generalisation which are characteristic of the Song (1:17; 2:9) (GHB 136j). The form is used to underline the beloved's incomparability.

עֵי תִּי is a term of endearment for the beloved, occurring only in the Song (1:9,15; 2:2,10,13; 4:17; 5:2; 6:4).

The masculine form עֵר is found in Hos 3:1. It is used by the beloved of her lover in 5:16, parallel to the more common epithet, עֵרָא.

1:10 חֲרִי comes from the root חָרַח, 'to go round'. Apart from 1:10,11 where it designates a piece of jewellery, it is used in the sense of 'rank' (1 Chr 17:17) or 'turn' (Esth 2:12,15).

חֲרָרִים is a hapax legomenon in the OT although it is found in post-biblical Hebrew of stringing pearls or fish (Pope 1977, 344). From this usage it may be assumed that the sense of the root is 'to perforate' or 'to pierce'. In Arabic, the noun haraz is used of a piece of jewellery. Hence my translation 'beads'.

1:11 נִקְרָרִית is also unique in the OT although other forms of the root נִקְרָר do appear in connection with spotted sheep (Gen 30:32; 31:32) and with crumbs of dry food (Josh 9:5; 1 Kgs 14:3). In post-biblical Hebrew the term is used to describe the Tiberian system of vocalisation, literally translated by ‘spots’ or ‘points’. In the context of 1:11, ‘spangles’ is more appropriate.

1:17 כְּתִינִי is another example of a plural of generalisation (GHB 136j).

רְהִיטָנָה (qere), meaning ‘rafters’ is preferable to the ketiv רְהִיטָנָה which is a hapax legomenon. The qere reading parallels the reference to beams in 1:17a. A nominal form of the same root appears in 7:6 concerning the beloved’s hair.

כִּרְרִי is the Aramaic form of כִּרְרִי, ‘cypresses’, according to Murphy (1990, 132). Pope (1977, 362) suggests that the change in spelling may be characteristic of a northern dialect.

2:1 חֲבַצְלֵת is a flower only mentioned once elsewhere (Isa 35:1). The exact identity of the flower is unknown although Moldenke (1952, 234-235) reckons it to be some sort of bulb. The LXX and Vg are non-committal. They simply translate *anthos* and *flos* respectively.

2:4 הָכִי אֲנִי is the third person singular hiphil perfect of the root כָּא, 'to come', with the first person singular suffix. LXX and Peshitta make the form an imperative in order to perpetuate the dialogue of 2:1-3.

גִּלְגָּל, a noun related to the Akkadian cognate *dagālu*, 'to look' or 'to see' has traditionally been translated by 'banner' (AV, RSV, JB, Robert). The noun and the verbal forms of 5:10, 6:4,10 will be considered in the section entitled Regal Imagery.

2:8 קָפַץ is the masculine singular piel participle of the root קָפַץ, usually 'to shut' or 'draw together'. It is not used elsewhere meaning 'to leap' although this usage is attested in the Aramaic and Arabic cognates, *qps* and *qfz* (Pope 1977, 389).

2:9 עֹפֶר is peculiar to the Song (2:9,17; 4:5; 7:4; 8:14). In post-biblical Hebrew it designates the young of an animal. In Arabic it is applied to the young of the chamois or ibex.

כַּתְלָנוּ, translated 'our wall', is unique to the Hebrew part of the OT. The Aramaic form of כַּתֵּל appears in Dan 5:5 and Ezra 5:8. Pope (1977, 391) suggests that it is a loan-word from Akkadian *kutallu*, 'backside' or 'back of the head'.

נִשְׁכַּח comes from a verb only used in the hiphil, meaning ‘to gaze’. The verb is relatively rare in the OT (Isa 14:16; Ps 33:14; Sir 40:29; 50:5), although it does appear later in post-biblical Hebrew and in Aramaic.

נִצַּח is a hapax legomenon in the OT. A similar verb *waṣwaṣ* is used in Arabic, of women peeping from behind a veil. The sense is established by means of parallelism (2:9ef).

חִלְכִּי is a hapax legomenon in the OT but is attested in post-biblical Hebrew. The root is probably חִלַּח, cognate with the Arabic noun *ḥark* meaning ‘fissure’. The word is a synonym for window חִלְכֵי בָרֶת (2:9e). Both are plurals of generalisation (cf. 1:4,9,17).

2:11 חִטִּי (qere חִטִּי) is a hapax legomenon and, according to Wagner (1966, 79), an aramaism. The Arabic cognate *ṣīṭa* designates both rain and winter. Here too, rain and winter are associated with each other.

2:12 צִנִּי is a hapax legomenon in the OT. The usual form is either the masculine singular צִנִּי (Gen 40:10) or the feminine singular צִנִּי (Isa 18:5; Job 15:33). The root צִנִּי is related to brightness (cf. Ezek 1:7). Here it is used to evoke the dazzling sight of a carpet of spring flowers. The form is also onomatopoeic.

חִנִּי is a hapax legomenon and is associated with two different roots, חָנַח ‘to cut’ and חָנַח ‘to sing’. In the context, the meaning is deliberately

ambiguous, for the reader is both referred back to the mention of the appearance of blossom (2:12a), and forward to the mention of birdsong (2:12c). The fact that the Gezer Calendar places the time for pruning much later (around July-August) is not the primary concern of the poet. His desire is to express by means of stylistic economy, the rapidity of the changing seasons and the urgency with which the beloved is summoned.

2:13 הַטַּח is a rare word, only used twice elsewhere in the OT (Gen 50:2,6). There, it is used in the sense of ‘embalming’. Here it has the sense of ‘ripening’.

הַיִּטְּ, translated by ‘its figs’, is a hapax legomenon. The word designates the first, unripe fruit in Aramaic and Arabic.

הַמִּטְּ is here translated as an attributive accusative, ‘the vines (being) in bloom’. The word occurs only in the Song (2:15c; 7:13c). According to Pope (1977, 398) it is also found in Judaic-Aramaic, Syriac, Mandaean and neo-Hebraic.

2:14 הַמִּטְּ is found elsewhere only in Ezek 38:20. There, the plural form parallels a reference to mountains and walls. The image is one of inaccessibility. I have translated the word by ‘mountain steep’.

2:17 הַתִּתְּ has caused interpreters some difficulty. Many rely on the etymology of the word which suggests separation. LXX understands the reference to

be to mountains, separated from each other by hollows and ravines. Ginsburg (1857) understands the reference to be to the physical separation which mountains impose upon the lovers. Lys (1968) understands the reference to be to the beloved's breasts. On the basis of parallelism with 8:14 it may refer to a kind of spice. Peshitta translates 'spices'.

The most convincing interpretation is that of Vg, Aquila and Symmachus, each of which understands the form to be a proper name, the town identified by Carroll (1923/24, 79) as the modern Bittîr, 11 km south west of Jerusalem. This is a likely suggestion because it places the mountains within travelling distance from Jerusalem, the setting of the Song.

3:1 בַּלַּיְלָוַת, translated by 'night after night' is a plural of generalisation (cf. 1:4,9,17; 2:9).

3:6 תִּימְרוֹת is a plural of generalisation (GHB 136j). The noun appears elsewhere only in Joel 3:3, where it is also related to שָׁעָן, 'smoke'.

מִקְטָרֶת is the feminine singular pual participle of קָטַר, 'to send up a sacrifice in smoke', (piel). The pual participle refers to the beloved (אֵלֶּיָּהּ) who is 'perfumed' or 'censed'. Vg and Targum revocalise the form to read 'with aromatics', the initial מ being understood as a shortened form of the preposition מִן, 'from'.

אֶבֶר is a hapax legomenon in the OT. The masculine form (אֶבֶר) is found in Deut 28:24 as a synonym of עָפָר, 'dust'.

3:7 מִטָּתוֹ, translated by 'his litter', is notable for the emphatic function of the pronominal suffix. Pleonasm is used to indicate the possessive. The form is (ש)ל מִטָּה.

3:9 עֲפִירִיּוֹן is a hapax legomenon and probably a loan-word. It may originate from the Greek *phoreion* (LXX), from the Sanskrit *pariyanka* or from the Persian *upari-yana*. It has been translated by 'palanquin'.

3:10 רִפְיָה is a hapax legomenon from the root רָפַר, 'to spread', or 'to stretch out' (Job 17:13; 41:42). The noun may either refer to a bed on which one stretches, or to that which is stretched over something else, for example, a roof. LXX and Vg choose the former and translate *anakliton* and *reclinatorium* respectively. In view of the context, discussed in Regal Imagery, I have chosen the former.

The passive participle רָצָה is a hapax legomenon, but the noun רָצָה, 'pavement' (Ezek 40:17f; 42:3; 2 Chron 7:3), and the use of cognate verbs in Akkadian and Arabic, suggests that the root meaning is 'to arrange' or 'to join'. Murphy (1990, 149) suggests 'woven'. Pope (1977, 446) suggests 'inlaid'. He envisages a mosaic inlay which decorates the interior of the litter. Several emendations have been proposed as regards the adverbial accusative אֶהֱבֵה, 'with love'. Graetz (1871) emended to אֶהֱבֵה, 'ebony',

and Gerleman (1965) to אֲבָבִים, 'stones'. Driver (1936) suggested that the reference is to 'leather', on the basis of the arabic cognate *'ihāb*. MT implies, as regards 3:10e, that the daughters of Jerusalem are responsible for the decoration of the interior. Most modern commentators (Keel, Pope, Murphy, Fox) agree that it makes more sense to link the daughters of Jerusalem (3:10e) to the daughters of Zion (3:11a). Both are addressed in the vocative. The ו before בָּנִים, 'daughters' (3:11c) should therefore be treated as enclitic, belonging to the preceding אֲבָבִים (3:10e).

3:11 בְּחֻמְתּוֹ, 'his wedding' is a hapax legomenon, derived from the root חָתַן, 'to marry'.

4:1 לִצְמִתָּךְ (cf. also 4:3; 6:7; Isa 47:2). LXX translates 'without your silence', Vg translates 'without that which lies hidden within'. Symmachus translates 'veil'. In Aramaic the verbs *šēmam* and *šamsēm* are used of veiling the face eg. Targ Gen 24:65.

וְגִלְגֵּל (cf. also 6:5) is a hapax legomenon. There is no unanimity among the ancient versions as to what the word means. Pope (1977, 459-60) suggests that the single occurrence of the verb *glt* in Ugaritic is helpful. It appears in the phrase *wtglt thmt* (PRU, V 2001.1.15). This suggests that the verb designates the movement of water, for in Gen 1:2 אֲבָתִים signifies 'the deep'. I therefore translate the verb by 'streaming'.

4:2 קָצַץ is found elsewhere only in 2 Kgs 6:6 where it means 'to cut off'.

4:3 מַרְכָּר is translated by most modern commentators by ‘mouth’ rather than by ‘speech’ (cf. LXX and Vg). They do so on the grounds of poetic parallelism; the description deals with parts of the body, hence the organ of speech rather than the act of speaking is most appropriate. Fox (1985, 130) suggests that the reason for choosing this hapax legomenon rather than the usual word פֶּה, ‘mouth’ is a sophisticated pun. It depends on the contrast between the ‘wilderness’ (מַרְכָּר) and ‘habitation’ (בֵּית אֱלֹהִים), suggested by the noun מַרְכָּר and the adjective בֵּית אֱלֹהִים.

קֶרֶן, according to Judg 4:21-22; 5:26 is the ‘temple’. In Cant 4:3 it has most often been translated by ‘cheek’ (Fox 1985, 130; Murphy 1990, 155) or by ‘cheeks’ (Robert, 1963, 163; JB). Robert suggests that an area rather more extensive than the temple is intended, perhaps the area from the temple down to the cheek-bone.

פֶּלֶח may either designate a slice or cut of something eg. a fig cake (1 Sam 30:12) or each of two halves (Judg 9:53; 2 Sam 11:21). Given the emphasis upon duality in this verse, it is the latter option that I have decided upon. JB and NIV are also of this opinion.

4:4 לַתִּלְפִּיט is a hapax legomenon. On the basis of parallelism with מִגָּן (4:4c) ‘shields’, it is probably some kind of weapon.

4:8 אֵל is revocalised by LXX, Peshitta and Vg to read אֵלָּה, the feminine singular qal imperative of the verb אָלָה ‘to come’. Read thus, the

assumption is that the lover calls his beloved to come to him. The emphasis of the MT is slightly different; he calls to her to accompany him as he descends the mountain-side. For the sake of fluency I have translated the form by, '<Come> with me'.

תָּשׁוּרִי may be read either as the feminine singular qal imperative of the verb שָׁוַר, 'to look' or 'to travel'. The latter is preferable because of the parallelism that is thereby established with תָּבֹא אֵי; 'Come!'. LXX and Peshitta read the form thus.

4:9 לִבִּי תִכְחֹץ may be read in the sense of 'to dishearten' or 'to hearten'. I have understood it as a privative piel (GHG 52h), 'You have ravished my heart'.

אֶחָד מֵעֵינֶיךָ has caused problems because of the grammatical disparity between the masculine numeral 'one' and the feminine plural noun 'eyes'. According to Ginsburg (1857), parts of the body which are usually feminine do sometimes appear in the masculine eg. Job 21:20; Zech 4:10. According to Gordis (1974, 87), it is an Aramaic construction.

עֵבֶר is to be found elsewhere only in the plural (Prov 1:9; Judg 8:26). LXX translates 'strand' rather than 'bead'. In the context, the translation 'bead' is better for there is a correspondence between the shape of the bead and that of her eyes.

צַרְרָךְ is a hapax legomenon. Its resemblance to the word צַרְאָר, ‘neck’ (4:4; 7:5) suggests that it refers to a necklace. LXX and Vg agree.

4:13 שִׁלְחֵיךָ has been rendered ‘shoots’ (AV) on the basis of the noun שִׁלְחָהּ תִּיָּהּ which is the word for ‘branches’ in Isa 16:8. The two nouns however are not identical in form. An alternative is that the שִׁלְחֵיךָ are irrigation channels, the שִׁלְחָהּ of mishnaic Hebrew (m. Moed Qaton 1.1; b. Bab. Bat 4:7). This second reading was first put forward by Haupt (1902b, 203, 207) with reference to Neh 3:15. It was elaborated by Fox (1985, 137) who argues that these irrigation channels also represent the irrigated area, the garden. LXX’s *apostoloi sou* and Vg’s *emissiones tuae* retain the ambiguity of the Hebrew.

פֶּרֶרֶט is a Persian loan-word, meaning ‘enclosure’ or ‘park’ (cf. Eccles 2:5; Neh 2:9).

כַּרְכֹּם is a hapax legomenon. It is generally thought to refer to saffron.

5:2 קַן צַדִּיק (cf. 5:11) is a hapax legomenon. It has been translated by ‘my locks’ on the basis of parallelism with 5:2e רֹאשִׁי, ‘my head’.

5:3 פִּיטָא comes from the root פִּיטָא, a hapax legomenon in the OT. It is attested in Aramaic and Akkadian, meaning ‘to soil’.

- 5:4 שֶׁלַח יָד בֶּן הַחֶרֶץ is best translated by ‘he thrust his hand in through the key-hole’ even although the preposition בֶּן usually means ‘from’. Pope (1977, 518), on the basis of Ugaritic usage, argues that כֶּן and בֶּן are interchangeable in Hebrew. בֶּן is translated by ‘through’ in 2:9. The phrase will be discussed in depth in the section entitled Images in Space.
- 5:6 כִּי־כָרַךְ translates most readily as ‘when he spoke’, but since her lover seems to leave without a word, this is inappropriate in the context. Transferred to 5:4b, it makes better sense. Fox (1985, 145-46) repoints the MT to read כִּי־כָרַךְ, ‘because of him’. Most apt is the suggestion made by Pope (1977, 526) ‘at his flight’. The Akkadian cognate *duppuru* meaning ‘to go away’, ‘to absent oneself’ is the basis of this interpretation.
- 5:10 רָגַל is a qal passive participle from a verb cognate the Akkadian *dagālu*, ‘to see’ or ‘to look’. In 5:10 it describes the lover’s incomparable beauty.
- 5:11 תַּלְתַּלִּים is a hapax legomenon in the OT. A clue to the meaning is given by the Akkadian *taltallû* which refers to the pollen of the date panicle (Pope 1977, 536). Pope also notes that the Arabic *taltalat* is used of the spadix of the date palm and that the word *taltall* is similar in pattern to three other hapax legomena which designate plant shoots or branches, *zalzallîm* (Isa 18:5), *salsillôt* (Jer 6:9) and *sansinnîm* (cf. 7:9). It is likely therefore that the reference is to the branches or fronds of the date palm.

5:12 מַלְאָתָּהּ עַל-יְשֻׁבֹרֶת is translated literally by ‘sitting in fullness’. LXX renders ‘sitting by the fullness of water’. My translation supposes the image of a river in spate.

Vaccari (1947, 399-401) has simplified the complex imagery of the verse by inserting the noun שֵׁנִי, ‘teeth’, a notable omission from the lover’s portrait (5:10-14). With this addition, the phrase מַלְאָתָּהּ עַל-יְשֻׁבֹרֶת refers to the firmness with which the lover’s teeth are set in their gums. The verse translates well with this emendation:

‘His eyes, like doves,
by the water streams.
His teeth, washed in milk,
set in place.’

There is however no external evidence for this addition. In my translation therefore I have remained as close as possible to the MT. The imagery is discussed in the section entitled Animals and Birds.

5:13 מִגְדָּלוֹת, ‘towers’ has been revocalised to correspond to the feminine plural piel participle מִגְדָּלוֹת from the root גָּדַל, ‘to put forth’, ‘to grow’ (piel). ‘Towers of fragrance’ makes little sense in the context in spite of the suggestion of Loretz (1964, 36) and Gerleman (1964, 175) that the reference is to perfume bottles. The revocalised reading enhances the parallelism with 5:13d; both 5:13b and 5:13d are characterised by participial phrases.

מִרְקָחִי is a hapax legomenon. It may be assumed from the context that the reference is to aromatic herbs.

5:14 יָד usually refers to the hand. It may also be used of the forearm (cf. Gen 24:30,47; Jer 38:12).

עֲשֻׁל is a hapax legomenon. Scholars have debated as to whether it is derived from the verb עָשָׁל, 'to be smooth' or whether the root is עָשָׁל, the Aramaic equivalent of עָשָׂה, 'to think'. According to Fox (1985, 149), the noun is used of a polished bar or block in mishnaic Hebrew (Cant. Rab. v 12). It is in this sense that I have translated it.

6:8 הֵנָּה, the masculine plural pronoun is associated with the feminine plural noun מַלְכָּה, 'queen' (GHB 149c).

6:11 אֶגְלִי is a hapax legomenon in the OT but in post-biblical Hebrew it is a generic term for 'nut' and a specific word for 'walnut'. According to Josephus (War III, x 8) the walnut tree was native to the Sea of Galilee.

7:2 מִרְקָח is a hapax legomenon, although מִרְקָח appears in 5:6 in the sense of 'turn'. It conveys both the shape and the movement of her thighs.

אֶפְרָח is a hapax legomenon. Similar forms are to be found in Prov 5:12 and Hos 2:15 in association with אֶפְרָח, 'ring'.

גִּלְגַּל is a hapax legomenon. The meaning is evident by comparison with the Akkadian *ummânu* and Aramaic *'ummân*, 'artisan'. Variants are to be found in Prov 8:30 and Jer 52:15.

7:3 גִּלְגַּל 'your navel'. The comparison is to a brimming bowl or goblet, hardly an image which comes to mind at the sight of any normal sized navel! Reference to the iconography of Syria is of help here (cf. Keel 1986, 215 fig. 116). There, women are depicted with enlarged navels, suggesting that the navel was considered an attribute of female beauty. Krinetzki (1981, 93) suggests that the navel represents a larger area corresponding to the lower abdomen.

On the basis of the Arabic cognate *sirr*, meaning 'secret', some have translated 'vulva' or 'pudenda' (Pope 1977, 617-618). Since the noun גִּלְגַּל appears in Ezek 16:4 with reference to the umbilical cord, I prefer to translate it by 'navel'.

גִּלְגַּל is only used twice elsewhere, in Exod 24:6 and in Isa 22:24. In both contexts it refers to a container. *Agannu*, in Akkadian, designates a bowl.

גִּלְגַּל is a hapax legomenon. LXX and Vg both understood 'turned'. Fox (1985, 159) proposes that the preceding definite article is a genitive of specification. It is on these grounds that I have translated 'a rounded bowl'.

לֹא here serves as an emphatic negation rather than as a prohibition (GHB 114k). The lover wishes that the bowl, which is a metaphor for his beloved's navel, may never lack wine.

גִּזְלִין is a hapax legomenon, probably an aramaism (Wagner 1966, 73-74) for the Hebrew גִּזְלִין, 'mixed wine', found only in Ps 75:9. The verb גִּזַּל, 'to mix' is rather more common (Isa 19:14; Ps 102:10).

סָרְסָר is the qal feminine singular passive participle of a root סָרַס. It is not attested in biblical Hebrew but appears in Aramaic and in post-biblical Hebrew. The meaning 'encircled' is therefore well founded.

7:5 בַּת - רַבִּים, literally 'daughter of many', is understood to be a proper name. It parallels the reference to pools in Heshbon (7:5b).

7:6 רִלְה 'hair' is derived from the verb רָלַל, 'to hang'. The form is found elsewhere only in Isa 38:12, where it designates the thread of the loom.

רִהוּטִי translated in 1:17 by 'rafters', comes from the verb רָהַט, 'to run' in Aramaic and Syriac. In Gen 30:38,41 the noun refers to conduits or water troughs. Essential to both, is the notion of movement. Here the reference is to the beloved's long, flowing hair (Delitzsch 1875).

7:7 בְּתַעֲנוּגִים, 'with delights' makes better sense if it is recognised that haplography has taken place. The scribe has most likely omitted a *taw*

after the initial *beth*. The *beth* therefore has become an inseparable preposition. Rather than one word, two words should be in evidence, כַּת תַּעֲנוּךְ גִּימָה, ‘daughter of delights’. This is how the Peshitta understood the form.

7:9 סַנְסַנִיָּה, ‘its branches’ is a hapax legomenon but is related to the Akkadian *sissinu*, ‘the upper branches of a date palm’ (Fox 1985, 163).

7:14 פֶּתַחֵינוּ ‘our door’ is a further example of a plural of generalisation (GHB 156j).

8:2 תִּלְמַדְנִי may be translated ‘she will teach me’ or ‘you will teach me’. In line with LXX and Peshitta, I have emended to תִּלְרַנִּי, ‘her who bore me’ in order to correspond to 3:4.

8:5 מִתְרַפֵּקַת translated ‘leaning’, is a hapax legomenon. The meaning is derived from the root רָפַק, ‘to support’.

ii **CRUX VERSES (NOT DEALT WITH IN THE SUBSTANCE OF THE TEXT)**

- 6:12 A literal translation of the verse makes little sense, 'I did not know; my soul set me; chariots of Ammi-nadib'. Neither were the ancient versions able to make much of it, as their diverse renderings show. LXX translates, 'my soul did not know it; it made me chariots of Ammi-nadib'. Peshitta translates, 'my soul did not know; it made me chariots of the people that is prepared'. Vg translates, 'I did not know; my soul disturbed me because of the chariots of Amminadib'.

Many emendations have been proposed, some of which require radical changes to the text, others of which produce translations which make little more sense than the text as it stands. These suggestions have been summarised by Pope (1977, 90). To their already substantial number, I venture to add my own.

The first question is whether the noun ׳וֹדִי is the subject or the object of the verb יָדָע (6:12a) 'to know', or whether it is the subject of the second verb ׳וֹדִי (6:12a), 'to put'. Translations have been offered on the basis of each of these possibilities, each time giving rise to a slightly different interpretation.

My preference is for the first option, 'Before I knew it ...' for this translation best conveys the speaker's profound surprise as unexpected

events suddenly overtake him, conveying him to a fantasy world, even as he waits in the quiet of the orchard.

NEB and Gordis (1974, 95) understand נַפְשִׁי , not as the subject, but as the object of the verb יָרַעַתִּי , with the result that the emphasis falls upon the remarkable change love brings about in the speaker, 'I did not know myself'. Gordis (1974, 95) claims that the phrase is an idiom indicating a loss of self-composure. He finds it in Job 9:21, where the speaker is overcome by sorrow.

The third possibility is that נַפְשִׁי is the subject of שָׁמַתָּנִי , literally, 'my soul placed me ...'. The reference is therefore to the power of love to transport one lover to the other's side. This is the reading preferred by Robert (1963, 244) and Pope (1977, 565). It leaves open the gender of the speaker, for the feminine singular noun נַפְשִׁי , 'my soul' governs the verb.

A second difficulty concerns the relationship between the verb שָׁמַתָּנִי , 'she placed me' and the plural noun מַרְכָּבוֹת (6:12b). As it stands the phrase lacks the preposition בְּ , 'in' which one would normally expect to find in the context. Pope (1977, 586) assures us however that one is justified in understanding the preposition בְּ , 'in' to be implied in the context on the grounds that the construction is an adverbial accusative.

Yet more thorny a problem is that of עַמִּי - בְּרִי . It has very often been left untranslated, as if it were a proper name. Gerleman (1964, 191)

suggests that a literary figure, like Prince Mehi in the Egyptian poem 'The Stroll' (Fox 1985, 53) is to be envisaged. Reference to a literary hero would indeed be appropriate in the context - that is, if it can be proven that Amminadib is a hero and not a villain! The name Amminadib is fairly common in the OT (Exod 6:23; Num 1:7; 2:3; 7:12,17; 10:14; Ruth 4:19,20; 1 Chron 2:10; 6:7; 15:10,11), yet those who bear it are not notable in any way. Neither does Gerleman explain the presence of the maqqeph in the proper name.

Robert (1963, 245) proposes an alternative which avoids as far as possible any manipulation of the MT. He considers the problematic עַמִּי - נָרִי to be two nouns in apposition, the first being the masculine singular noun עַם, 'people' with the first person singular suffix, 'my', and the second being the masculine singular noun נָרִי, 'a prince'. On the basis of this simple solution he translates the phrase as follows;

'... among the chariots of my people, as prince.'

Robert would seem to be on the right lines, yet like Gerleman, he does not address the problem of the maqqeph. Normally a maqqeph either suggests that the words are closely associated in meaning or that the first word is in the construct state (GHB 13). This is not possible here because the noun נָרִי relates not only to the preceding word עַמִּי, 'my people', but to the entire preceding phrase. Could it not be then that the maqqeph is the result of dittography, the final *yod* of עַמִּי having been duplicated by a similar form, a maqqeph? The noun נָרִי would therefore stand in

apposition to the preceding phrase. Read thus the verse makes good sense. It describes the way in which the beloved's love for her lover makes him feel like a prince, someone marked out for all kinds of privileges. He is simply overwhelmed by this joyful sensation, as he strolls in the orchard:

‘Before I knew it, she set me
among the chariots of my people, as prince’

7:1 הַשָּׁלֹמֶל מִיָּת occurs only twice in the OT, on both occasions in the Song (7:1).

There are three main lines of interpretation:

- 1 Some relate the form to the name of Solomon (Rowley 1939, 84-91) and to meanings of the root שָׁלַם (Robert 1963, 249; Fox 1985, 157). They agree that the definite article is appropriate in so far as it precedes not a proper name, but a title, ‘the Solomoness’ (Rowley), ‘La Pacifiée’ (Robert).

- 2 Others (LXX B) equate הַשָּׁלֹמֶל מִיָּת with שֶׁלֹּמֶל מִיָּת a woman from the town of Shunem. An identification is often made with Abishag of Shunem (1 Kgs 1:1-4,15; 2:17-25). Pope (1977, 597) admits that Shunem and Shulem are equivalent forms since l, n and r were interchangeable in certain semitic dialects. In the OT however, it is not Shulem, but Shunem that is mentioned (Josh 19:18; 1 Sam 28:4).

- 3 Yet others (Erbt 1906, 196; Wittekindt 1926, 6) argue that the form is an epithet of the goddess Ishtar. A variation of this hypothesis was offered

by Albright (1931-32, 164-169) who argues that לְמִיָּהּ refers to the war-goddess Shulmânîtu, the female counterpart of the war-god Šulmân. Her name was then conflated with the name of the Shunemite woman, giving Shulamite.

The truth of the matter is that the form remains enigmatic, yet the variety of solutions proposed is perhaps a clue to the intention of the poet. It is to create an epithet which bears within it numerous possibilities; the presence of the root לְשׁ reminds the reader of Solomon, the king who is sometimes associated with the lovers (1:5; 3:7,11), of Jerusalem, the city to which the beloved's confidantes belong (1:5; 2:7; 3:5; 5:8 etc.), of the perfection which the lover attributes to his beloved (4:2; 6:6,9) and of the peace which he finds in her eyes (8:10). The epithet $\text{לְשׁוֹמֵרֵי עֵינֶיהָ}$ plays on all these associations at once. It acts as a trigger to the imagination. That is why, in my translation, I have simply left the title as it stands.

There are several possibilities as to its composition. According to Robert (1965, 249-50), it is a qal passive participle, like *yûlād* in Judg 13:8, with the feminine adjectival affirmative לְ . Fox (1985, 157-58) derives the form from the noun *šulam* of the pattern *quttāl/qūtāl*, meaning 'perfection'. He argues that the formation of adjectives by the addition of the gentilic yod is common in mishnaic Hebrew. The form would therefore mean, 'the perfect, unblemished one'.

A further difficulty is the translation of כַּמִּחֲלֵת הַמִּחַנֵּי. The Leningrad Codex of the MT understands the initial preposition to be the comparative כִּי, whilst in other manuscripts the preposition is כִּן. Pope (1977, 605) suggests that the preposition כִּי may also have a temporal meaning ie. ‘as she dances’. This does not seem necessary in the context. It requires a simple comparison; ‘Why do you gaze upon the Shulamite, (as you would gaze upon) ...?’

The root לָחַץ ‘to turn’, or ‘to dance’ has been the subject of much discussion. The nouns מִחַנֵּי and מִחֲלֵת are used in a variety of contexts, in particular in the context of the safe return from battle (Judg 11:34). They are also used of the accompanying song and dance, performed by the women of the warriors (Exod 15:20; 1 Sam 18:6-7; 12:12; 29:3). Gerleman (1964, 192-93) and Fox (1985, 158) suggest that the form should be revocalised to מִחֲלֵת to read ‘dancer’ rather than ‘dance’ (cf. GHB 129).

The final difficulty is the translation of מִחַנֵּי, for the form is not the usual plural of the noun מִחַן, ‘camp’. The form however may simply be the assimilation of the less usual plural form מִחַנִּים (cf. Num 13:19) to the place name מִחַנֵּי, the well-known site near the Jabbok (2 Sam 17:29). The presence of the definite article indicates that the intention of the poet was not primarily topographical. LXX, Peshitta and Vg all translate the form by ‘camps’.

In the light of the military associations of the second noun $\square \text{ } \text{ } \square \square \square$, and the role of women which was to dance before the warriors of their people (cf. Exod 15:20; Judg 11:34; 1 Sam 18:6-7 etc.) the imagery of 7:2 begins to make sense. It relates directly to the appeal addressed to the Shulamite in 7:1a-b;

‘Come back, come back O Shulamite,

Come back, come back, that we may gaze upon you’

Her lover responds to this appeal on her behalf, challenging an anonymous male chorus with the propriety of their appeal:

‘Why do you gaze upon the Shulamite

as upon a dancer before the camps?’

It is not that they ^{should} cease to look upon women such as Jephthah’s daughter (Judg 11:34) and Miriam (Exod 15:20) who dance publically in celebration of military victory, but that the same admiration is inappropriate when it concerns a woman who is not fulfilling this public role. The Shulamite is primarily his beloved (cf. 6:4) and consequently for his eyes alone.

7:10 This verse has also caused problems. Firstly $\text{ } \square \square \square$, literally ‘your palate’, must refer to the beloved’s kisses which are compared to the best wine (cf. 1:2; 4:10). The beloved then interrupts her lover (7:10b), thereby expressing her eagerness to lavish kisses upon her lover. The clue to the change of speaker is the epithet $\text{ } \text{ } \text{ } \square \square \square$ which always refers to him (cf. 1:13-

14,16; 2:3,8 etc.). The presence of both voices in a single sentence discloses the depth of love between them.

The adverb כִּי שָׁרֵי has been translated 'smoothly' (cf. 'rightly' in 1:4).

This translation may be justified from Prov 23:37.

כִּכֵּךְ is a hapax legomenon, probably derived from the Aramaic כִּכֵּךְ, cognate with the Hebrew כִּכֵּךְ, 'to flow'. The ancient versions are of little help. LXX renders *hikanoumenos*, 'sufficient'. Robert (1963, 641) considers this rendering to be a misspelling of *hikanomenos* from *hikanō* 'to advance' (cf. Arabic *dabba*, 'to move gently'). Vg looked to another root, possibly the Aramaic כִּכֵּךְ, 'to murmur' and translated *ad ruminandum*. I have opted for the solution offered by Pope (1977, 640).

The phrase כִּי שָׁרֵי יָפֶתִי, literally 'the lips of sleepers', has stimulated much discussion. Delitzsch (1875, 132) proposes that the reference is to sleep-talking. Pope (1977, 641) suggests that the sleepers are the dead who receive libations at the funerary feast. Robert (1963, 275) regards the form כִּי שָׁרֵי as a plural of generalisation which refers to the beloved who is attentive to her lover, even as she sleeps (cf. 5:2).

An emendation is proposed by LXX, Peshitta and Vg. They replace the initial *yod* of כִּי שָׁרֵי by a *waw* and read the final *mem* as enclitic. The result is 'my lips and teeth' which is appropriate in the context. It means that a further change of speaker probably takes place in 7:10c, for the

kisses which flow from the beloved's mouth pass over, not only her own lips and teeth, but also those of her lover. It is the strong sense of reciprocity conveyed by the shifting speakers which is important.

- 8:6 The realm of the dead, Sheol, is frequently personified in the OT as a monster swallowing its victims (Prov 1:12; Isa 5:14; Hab 2:5). Death too is personified as a robber (Jer 9:20) as a gaoler (Hos 13:14; Ps 18:6), as an enemy in battle (Ps 13:3-5) etc. In 8:6, the phrase 'strong as death' reminds the reader of the ancient Canaanite myth in which Baal overcomes and subdues death, personified by Mot (KTU 1.6). On the basis of parallelism (8:6cd) it is likely that Sheol too is personified here (cf. Murphy 1990, 191). It is onto this cosmological stage that love makes its entry, boldly challenging the negative forces of death and chaos. Tromp (1979, 94) suggests that love too is personified here, thereby minimising the distinction between love and God.

This is important for the interpretation of $\text{שֶׁל הַכֶּתֶר יָהּ}$ in the following colon (8:6f). The feminine singular noun שֶׁל הַכֶּתֶר is found in Ezek 21:3 and in Job 15:30, meaning 'flame'. LXX and Vg understand the final יָהּ to be the third person feminine singular pronominal suffix referring to the noun הַכֶּתֶר , 'love' (8:6c). They translate the form by 'its flames'. On account of the vocalisation of MT however, it may be that the two final letters represent a shortened form of the divine name. This shortened form occurs usually with a mappiq in the final letter (eg. Ps 118:5; Jer 2:31). In these texts it has the force of the superlative, cf. Thomas (1953, 209-227).

In this context however, where allusions to other cosmic forces press just beneath the surface, implicit reference to Yahweh, the God of Israel, may not be out of place. The suffix hints, that there is a divine dimension to natural, human love. The ^{Ben Naphtali} reading makes this allusion more explicit. It does so by creating parallelism between 8:6ef; ‘darts of fire’ (8:6e) are set against ‘flames of Yah’ (8:6f). ^ל The addition of a mappiq in the final letter differentiates the form from שֶׁלֹּהֶבֶת יְהוָה.

The nature of the love described in 8:6 is also noteworthy. Some have translated the noun שֶׁלֹּהֶבֶת by ‘passion’ (Pope 1977, 669; Tromp 1979, 89) as if it were narrowly sexual in character. A survey of the use of the root שֶׁלֹּהֶבֶת would suggest that it is much broader in meaning. It describes the zeal with which the prophet Elijah worked for the purposes of God (1 Kgs 19:10) and the outrage of a husband whose wife has given herself to another (Num 5:14). Most often, it is used in the context of the absolute dependence of Israel upon her God. Should she compromise her privileged position in any way, he is moved to jealousy (Exod 20:5; 34:14; Deut 4:24; 5:9; 6:15; Joel 2:18; Zech 1:14). In the Song, it describes the absolute belonging of the lovers to each other (cf. 2:16; 6:3) and their defiance of any menace to their relationship, whether it be the ‘little foxes’ (2:15), her brothers (1:6) or the nightwatchmen (5:7).

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

i A SURVEY OF SCHOLARSHIP

A survey of scholarship is necessary in order to situate this thesis in the vast body of scholarly literature devoted to the Song. On account of the sheer volume of this literature however, I shall limit myself to a few central questions which lie at the heart of scholarly debate. In the light of this discussion, the motivation for my search for another approach will become apparent, as will the aims and limitations of a literary study.

The obscurity of the Song's origins accounts for the diversity of scholarly opinions as regards authorship date, social context and literary history. None of these issues has been decisively resolved.

First of all there is the difficulty of determining who wrote the Song. Until the 19th century it was generally assumed that the Song was written in the 10th century BC and by Solomon. Most scholars now agree that the superscription, which ascribes the Song to Solomon, is the contribution of an editor who sought to associate the Song with a king whose literary activities are attested in 1 Kgs 5:12.¹ Moreover, given the extremely subordinate role of Solomon in the Song,

¹ There is also the linguistic trait which differentiates 1:1 from the rest of the Song, for there, the classical relative pronoun $\neg\psi\chi$ is used. Elsewhere the proclitic particle ψ is used (1:6,12; 6:5).

it seems likely that the intention of the ascription is as much theological as literary, namely to facilitate the Song's entry into the canon by association with the patron of Wisdom literature.

The question of authorship was therefore declared open and the question began to be asked as to whether it might not be possible for there to be not one, but many authors who, over the course of several centuries, contributed to the Song. The debate as to whether the Song is an anthology (Gordis, Falk) or the work of a single author (Fox, Elliot) continues today.

Related to the question of authorship is that of dating. Among those who have tried to date the Song is Gerleman (1965, 75-77). He has argued for an early date on the basis of the receptivity of the Solomonic age to Egyptian influences. He suggests that Solomon's cultured entourage found an important model for their work in the humanism of Ramesside art and literature and that it was by means of this courtly milieu that Egyptian influences found their way into the Song. Other scholars have found other opportune moments for the transmission of these influences. Fox (1985, 186-189) points to the period of Egyptian imperial rule in Syro-Palestine, the period which corresponds to the flowering of love poetry in Egypt. Keel (1986, 12-14) and Williams (1975, 252) have suggested the time of Hezekiah. Murphy (1990, 4) highlights the danger of trying to determine the date of the Song from cultural influences which are likely to have lasted a long time. In response to Gerleman he suggests that the Song may as easily belong to the Persian as to the Solomonic period, for at that time

diverse cultural traditions were widely disseminated throughout the Ancient Near East.

Nor is there any clue to the date in the geographical data of the Song. It has been claimed by Gordis (1974, 23) that the reference to Tirzah (6:4) suggests that the unit (6:4-7), in which it is found, belongs to the time of the city's prominence as capital of the northern kingdom, that is, to the period before 876 BC when Omri made Samaria the capital of his kingdom. To other units he attributes a later date, according to the linguistic traits present there.

The difficulty however of arguing for a specific date on the basis of history is that the allusion to Tirzah may as easily refer to an idealised past as to present reality. Moreover the lovers show no real interest in historical or political events. They are entirely absorbed in each other and in their private world of love and longing. The two cities of Tirzah and Jerusalem are chosen primarily on account of their regal associations. It is the associations of beauty and dignity which make them appropriate metaphors of the beloved's splendour. Jerusalem was long known for its beauty (Lam 2:15; Jer 6:2). Tirzah is a fitting parallel, for the notion of loveliness is contained within the etymology of its name.²

The absence of allusions to historical events and of elements of polemic or of rhetoric which might relate the Song to a particular political situation meant that scholars next turned to philology, the study of its vocabulary and grammatical

² The name Tirzah derives from the verb לָצַח , 'to be pleasing'.

forms. This avenue of study stimulated much debate as elements of both an early and a late date were discovered.

Albright (1963, 1-7) and Pope (1977, 27) argue that most of the material is early, on the basis of lexical, grammatical and literary parallels with Ugaritic. Albright argues that the presence of foreign loan-words in 3:9 and 4:13 suggests that this early material was collected and edited much later, probably in the 15th-11th BC.

Robert (1963, 21) and Fox (1985, 186-189) on the other hand argue that the substance of the Song is Persian, on the basis of the many words which correspond to Aramaic, the language of the Jews sometime after the Exile. Fox notes Mishnaic forms and on the basis of these suggests that the Song in its final form may belong to the late Persian or even Hellenistic period. The *terminus ad quem* must be the first half of the 2nd BC, since a fragment of the Song was found at Qumran.

The matter is far from settled, although the consensus of a post-exilic date for the final redaction of the Song seems to be emerging. One of the main points of contention which remains concerns the alleged Aramaisms which Hurwitz (1968, 324-340) claims is not a sign of lateness but rather of northern provenance. He points out that the northern dialect shared a number of linguistic traits with Aramaic. Pope (1977, 33-34) adds the reminder that Aramaic is as old as Hebrew and that a number of features found in Aramaic are already present in Ugaritic.

Hence, signs of lateness, identified by Robert, may in fact be much more archaic than Robert suggests.

Of how the Song came to be canonical little is known, except that the sanctity of the Song and the predominance of an allegorical interpretation seem to have advanced hand in hand. Particularly influential in this process was R. Aqiba who defied anyone to sing the Song in taverns, that is, simply as a piece of entertainment:

‘He who trills his voice in chanting the Song of Songs in the banquet house and treats it as a sort of Song has no part in the world to come’

t. Sanh 12.10

It seems that, by the time of his debate with R. Jose and R. Eleazar ben Azariah ca 90 AD, the matter of the Song’s canonicity had already been discussed, if not conclusively decided. To the scepticism of R. Eleazar ben Azariah as regards the Songs canonicity, R. Aquiba responds rigorously in its defence:

‘God forbid no man in Israel has ever disputed the Song of Songs that it does not render the hands unclean. For all ages are not worth the day on which the Song of Songs was given to Israel; for all the writings are holy but the Song of Songs is the holy of holies. If ought was in dispute, the dispute was about Ecclesiastes alone.’

Yad 3.5

If R. Eleazar ben Azariah was hesitant to recognise the Song’s sanctity, and if R. Aqiba was particularly adamant in its defence, it is surely because the Song

was well known to both of them as a classic of Hebrew poetry. Moreover scattered allusions to an allegorical interpretation as early as the first century remain. This suggests that the interpretation was confined to certain rabbinic circles in the early days.³ Barthélemy (1985) attributes an allegorical interpretation to a number of rabbis prior to, and contemporary with Aqiba. He does not however suggest that the interpretation was, at that stage, normative.

In the course of the early centuries however, under the influence of hellenistic philosophy, the allegorical interpretation became predominant, as verses and sometimes individual words of the Song were used to formulate a variety of traditional teaching. By the early Middle Ages not only were there three midrashim devoted to the Song (Cant Rab., Aggadat Shir Hashirim, Midr. Shir Hashirim) but the Targum too provided a commentary on the Song. It was the first to read the Song as a sequence, depicting the history of Israel from the Exodus to the coming of the Messiah.

The allegorical reading is closely related to the imagery of prophetic texts (Hos 1-3; Isa 50:1; 54:4-8; Jer 2-3; Ezek 16:23) in which Israel is depicted as an unfaithful bride. To these chastening texts the Song responds with the assurance of divine love and the fulfilment of God's purposes.

³ Hints of an allegorical interpretation may be present in *The Life of Adam and Eve*, dated from before 70 AD. Robert (1963, 25) suggests that it alludes to Cant 4:14. Images of the Song are also to be found in 4 Esdr 5:24-26; 7:26, a text which was written about 100 AD. There, Israel is spoken of in images used of the beloved in the Song; she is described as a lily (2:2), a stream (4:15), a dove (2:24) and as a bride (4:8).

The allegorical interpretation, conceived in Jewish circles in the early centuries of our era, profoundly influenced *Christian* writers who at that time were beginning to elaborate an ecclesiology. Origen, in particular, saw the relationship between the imagery of the Song and the nuptial imagery of the NT (Matt 9:15; 25:1-3; John 3:29; 2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:22-23; Rev 19:6-8; 21:9-11; 22:17) and in his commentary on the Song, written in 240 AD,⁴ he consistently identifies the beloved with the Church, and her lover with Christ. Like Hippolytus (d. 235) before him,⁵ he was not unaware of the plain sense of the Song which he considered to be a marriage epithalamium in dramatic form. Its importance however lay in the theological truths to which it gave access by means of symbols and figures.⁶

The Alexandrine School, to which Origen belonged, perceived in the sacred text not only mystical (or theological) but also moral (or spiritual) dimensions. This last expository technique meant that the Song also came to depict the relationship of the individual believer to Christ, just as in Jewish

⁴ The first three volumes of his commentary and Latin translations of two of his homilies on the Song are published in PG 13, 35-198. Surviving Greek fragments and Origen's scholia are published in PG 15, 197-216 and PG 17, 253-288.

⁵ Hippolytus' comments on the Song are published in PG 23, 767.

⁶ Origen's approach contrasts markedly with that of Theodore of Mopsuestia of the Antiochene School. He resisted the idea that the Song should be interpreted as Solomonic prophecy concerning the spiritual relationship between Christ and the Church. He considered the Song to be love poetry written by Solomon in response to those who criticised his marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh (see Pg 87, 27-214).

circles, his counterparts saw the Song as an expression of the quest of the individual soul for God.⁷

The interpretations proffered by Origen were developed in a variety of ways in patristic and medieval periods. Throughout that time, words from the Song are mentioned whenever they are suitable for evoking the central experiences of the spiritual life, for elucidating something of the mystery of faith. They are to be found in hymns, letters, homilies and commentaries and with particular density in the baptismal catechisms of Ambrose and Cyril.⁸ In these fourth century liturgies, it is the mystical interpretation which predominates. In the spiritual writings of Gregory of Nyssa and Bernard of Clairvaux, it is the moral or spiritual interpretation which comes to the fore.⁹ St Theresa of Avila and St John of the Cross also belong to this tradition.

The allegorical interpretation has survived though with fewer adherents, in the 20th century. Among those who do favour this reading are Joüon (1909) and Robert (1963), both of whom follow the targumic interpretation which sees

⁷ This interpretation is evident in the fragmentary second century midrashic text *Shiur Komah* and in later Jewish Qabbalistic literature.

⁸ For a detailed examination of this early Christian literature see Pelletier (1989). Her thesis is devoted to the demonstration of how texts from the Song were used to elucidate different aspects of Christian faith.

⁹ An extension of the mystical interpretation is evident in the identification of the beloved with the Virgin Mary. This interpretation was particularly favoured in the Middle Ages. The tympanum of the 13th century church at la Charité-sur-Loire makes particular reference to the Song in the depiction of the theme of the Coronation of the Virgin. She ascends amid the cedars of Lebanon to meet her beloved, Christ.

Yahweh and Israel as the chief protagonists. A particularly interesting development of this interpretation is proposed by Tournay (1988) who suggests that the protagonists are Israel and the hoped-for Messiah. He relates the themes of seeking and finding, of absence and presence to the experience of the Exile.

The allegorical interpretation in its various forms is a venerable tradition which, so far from being cold and mechanistic, is extremely supple. Its strength lies in its capacity to stimulate the imagination to explore the very parameters of faith. In so doing it discloses the spiritual and theological depths of a particular world view, Jewish or Christian.

The disadvantage however is that the Song is in danger of becoming a code to be cracked, a means to an end, for the Song tends to be subordinated to a predetermined meaning in the light of which it is increasingly obscured. Indeed it may even be forgotten that human love, which is the vehicle of the allegory, may itself grant a glimpse of the divine.

It is not in order to deny its theological significance that certain scholars have recently set about to try to rehabilitate its plain sense (Audet, Murphy). On the contrary, they have rejected the facile opposition between allegorical and naturalistic readings which suggests that, if the Song is not an allegory of divine love, then it must be profane and hence irreligious.

The process begins with the distancing of the Song from the prophetic tradition. Fox (1985, 237-238) does so by asserting that whereas nuptial language

is used by the prophets negatively to speak of Israel's apostasy, in the Song the language is entirely positive. Moreover in the prophetic texts, the allegory is always explained and the protagonists identified, whereas in the Song, the allegory, if there is one, is never made explicit.

Audet (1955, 202-211, 216-221) has gone further and has placed the Song firmly in the sapiential tradition. Marks of sapiential authorship may be seen in the ascription to Solomon (1:1), the patron of Wisdom and in the reflection upon love's power towards the end of the Song (8:6b-7). It is also evident in the sophistication of its language, in the poet's taste for neologisms, archaisms, rare words and in his delight in exotic plants and spices. This has been noted by Winandy (1960, 53ff). It is evident above all in the powerful affirmation of human sexuality which corresponds to their interest in all natural phenomena. Parallels to this affirmation of human sexuality are to be found elsewhere in Scripture, in Adam's cry of joy when he first saw Eve (Gen 2:2-3) and in the words of praise in Prov 30:19 for the glorious mystery of human love. Both of these passages, it has been argued, bear the mark of the sage's hand (Alonso-Schökel 1976, 468-480).

Audet (1955, 197-221), in his comments upon the Song, lays considerable stress upon the implicitly theological world view which governs all sapiential writings. The significance of the Song therefore is in its affirmation of human sexuality as part of the divinely created order. Moreover, as Tromp suggests, (1979, 94) love is personified as a creative power in opposition to death in 8:6a. The distinction therefore between God and love is extremely thin. Indeed it may

have been the simplicity of the sapiential reading that was the catalyst to the elaboration and definition of the allegorical readings which henceforth became normative. The danger was a pastoral one, for the Song might appear to advocate human, sexual love set loose from the constraints of moral choice. Childs (1979, 575) and Audet (1955, 213) argue that marital love is implied by the canonical context of the Song. The Song itself however makes no mention of marriage as the appropriate context, even if might be assumed in ancient Israel. It is love as a force (8:6), not the institution which nourishes it, which is acclaimed unreservedly by the Song. It is easy to imagine the anxiety of those concerned with the moral guidance of their people to want to add an important provision. Instead an allegorical interpretation conveniently lifted the Song to an entirely spiritual plane.

Towards the end of the 19th century a number of different interpretations were advanced, each of which was stimulated by the translation of hitherto unknown Mesopotamian, Egyptian and Canaanite texts. This is the cultic interpretation which seeks to establish that the Song derives from a foreign fertility liturgy, adopted by Israel sometime before the exile. A number of variations of this interpretation have been proposed. Erbt (1906) suggested that the Song consisted of paschal poems of Canaanite origin, De Jassy (1914) that it is a Hebrew translation of Egyptian Osiris litanies. Meek (1924) related the Song back to the Tammuz cult and Wittekindt (1926) to a liturgy celebrated in Jerusalem concerning the marriage of the gods Ishtar and Tammuz. Schmökel (1956) discerned, in the Song, traces of a Sacred Marriage liturgy which had been

deliberately suppressed, and Kramer (1969) proposed that the Song accompanied a form of Sacred Marriage Rite persistent in Solomonic times.

If the aim of the Sacred Marriage Rite was to promote fertility of the land and of its people, the Song is totally lacking in interest in procreation. Indeed in contrast to the joy of many couples of biblical tradition which is their children - Abraham and Sarah (Gen 21:1-7), Hannah and Elkanah (1 Sam 2:1-10), Elizabeth and Zechariah (Luke 1:57-66), the lovers of the Song are preoccupied only with each other. It is love for love's sake which the Song celebrates.

If the Sacred Marriage songs are overlaid with cultic motifs, with the narrative descriptions of rituals, prayers for fertility and announcements of divine blessing, the Song lacks any obviously cultic motifs. Nor do the above-mentioned literary genres which characterise Sacred Marriage songs ever appear in the Song. It instead is characterised by dialogue and by descriptive songs (4:1-7; 5:10-16; 6:4-10; 7:1-5) in praise of the loved one's beauty. Moreover among the texts most closely associated with the Sacred Marriage rite only the most slender parallels pertain. These have been enumerated by Murphy (1990, 49-51).¹⁰ Another major difference is the explicit nature of Sacred Marriage songs. This is the contrary to the subtle eroticism of the Song.

¹⁰ They consist of the theme of the lover knocking^{on} the door in 5:2 (cf. ANET 1969, 638-9), the description of the outstanding beauty of the beloved in 6:10 (cf. Jacobsen 1987, 113) and the description of the procession in 3:6-11 (cf. Jacobsen 1987, 116).

In each of these respects the Song is unlike the Sumerian Sacred Marriage songs. It does however have certain affinities with Sumerian love literature whose relationship to the Sacred Marriage rite has recently been called into question by Alster (1985, 127-159). Whilst Kramer (1952, 360) defined Sumerian love songs as 'religious rather than secular in character' and considered them to be mainly concerned with the Sacred Marriage rite, Alster (1985, 127-128) points out that only a small number of songs are Sacred Marriage texts as such, and that there are others which seem to tell stories about the gods without any apparent connection to rituals. These are the songs which sing of the courtship of Dumuzi and Inanna, songs identified by Jacobsen (1987, 2) as being popular stories and songs in which Dumuzi and Inanna represent any two young lovers.

Even more pertinent to the Song are the royal love songs, songs which Kramer suggests would have been sung during Sacred Marriage festivities. Murphy (1990, 51-52) has recognised that although they are addressed to Inanna, they appear to celebrate natural, human love. Thus it is that a number of the motifs found in these courtly love songs also appear in the Song, for they are common-places of love poetry. These include the brother-sister epithets¹¹ and the expression of the sweetness of the loved one's charms.¹²

The search for thematic correspondences in Sumerian love literature is similar to the comparative work undertaken by Fox (1985) as regards Egypt,

¹¹ ANET (1969, 645), 'Set Me Free My Sister'.

¹² ANET (1969, 645), 'The Honey-man'.

where the comparisons are much more important and to which reference will be made throughout this thesis. Ramesside art and especially its literature were characterised by a naturalism and an interest in human psychology which make them important precursors of the Song.¹³ Moreover they are almost entirely humanistic, concerned with the exploration of human emotions and sexuality.

Other scholars have searched Ugaritic and Akkadian texts for evidence of love literature. Among the most fruitful is the work of Held (1961). He discovered certain similarities with the Song in the old Babylonian dialogic love poem, 'A Faithful Lover'.¹⁴ He has also argued (1961, 5) that the 12th century Assyrian text,¹⁵ which inspired Meek (1922-23) to relate the Song to the Sacred Marriage rite, contains many titles which suggest that the love songs to which they refer are secular. Renger (1972-, 251-259) too distances the love literature of the Ancient Near East from the cult. He does so by arguing for the limited influence of the Sacred Marriage rite. He considers it to be a localised ritual, part of the coronation ceremony of certain kings of the Ur III and Isin dynasties.

One other cultic interpretation deserves special attention. It is the thesis of Pope (1977, 210-229). He argues that the background to the Song is the love

¹³ Fox (1985, 181) dates the Egyptian love songs from the 19th dynasty (ca. 1305 - 1200 BC) and the early 20th dynasty (ca. 1200 - ca. 1150).

¹⁴ In particular, he suggests (1961, 5) that the chorus of 'gossipy women' plays a similar role to that of the daughters of Jerusalem. They seem to want to pry into the lovers relationship (II, 19) and constantly get in the way (III, 10-14).

¹⁵ The text was published by E. Ebeling, *Keilschrifttexte aus Assur religiösen Inhalts*, Leipzig 1919.

feast which accompanied the funerary rite. This interpretation not only presumes a high degree of assimilation to Canaanite customs on the part of Israel but it rests entirely on two texts 2:4-5 and 8:6. The theory is therefore unable to account for the Song as a whole. Like the Sacred Marriage interpretation, it makes the Song fit a hypothetical context.

Another suggestion is that the Song is a play to be performed. Origen had described the Song as a nuptial poem in dramatic form, in the first lines of his Prologue.¹⁶ The Codex Sinaiticus and the Codex Alexandrinus offered notes in the margin, assigning parts to speakers. The antiquity of these interpretations was a great source of stimulus to 19th century proponents of the dramatic theory. No consensus could be gained however as to the number of main characters and their relationship with each other. Nor could it be agreed how many acts and scenes the play comprised. Each interpretation required substantial stage directions due to the constant unexpected shifts in speaker, tone and setting.

Two entirely different suggestions were made as to the plot. According to Delitzsch (1875) there are two characters, Solomon and his lowly bride, the Shulamite. The Song sings of their great love. Delitzsch presents Solomon as a hero and recognises him to be a type of Christ (1875, 5).

The second suggestion is of a three characters drama. It gives the Song the character of a moral tale, for it supposes a love triangle in which the love of

¹⁶Lawson (1957, 21).

the Shulamite's shepherd lover triumphs over the flattery of the king. This is the story-line suggested by Driver (1913), Ewald (1826) and Renan (1884) although each varies in its details.

The Song however does not place Solomon in the foreground, either as hero or villain, as these story-lines suggest. Nor is there sufficient consistency of character, setting and tone to maintain any clear narrative line. Rather the story of the Song lies in the shifting emotions of the lovers' hearts. The epithets by means of which they address each other do not refer to external reality as proponents of the dramatic theory suggest, but rather to the reality of the heart. Thus it is that the lovers are many things to each other simultaneously, brother-sister, bride, king, dove.

Of utmost importance is the dialogue by means of which the lovers continue to address each other. This lends great immediacy to the events of love and gives the Song a dramatic quality. It is however not a drama as such. Indeed drama was unknown in Semitic antiquity. Much more likely is the suggestion made by Fox (1985, 256-58) that a variety of singers represent the main characters before an audience. The dialogue of the lovers and the suggestion of a chorus (2:7; 3:5; 5:8-9; 6:1; 8:4-5) strongly suggests some kind of public recitation.

Yet another suggestion is that the Song is related to the Hebrew marriage rite. Origen was the first to suggest that the Song was a marriage-song (Lawson 1957, 21). Bossuet (1693) suggested that it was a Solomonic nuptial liturgy and a century later Lowth (1753) agreed, although he drew particular attention to the

loose structure of the Song. On the basis of extensive study of 19th century Syrian wedding customs, Wetzstein (1873) suggested that the Song reflected the seven day-long wedding celebrations which accompany the Hebrew marriage rite. In particular he noted the custom of honouring the bridal couple as royalty, the use of *wasfs* to praise bride and groom and the custom of a sword-dance performed by the bride. He argued that parallels to each of these aspects of Hebrew wedding celebrations are to be found in the Song.

The Song, or parts of it, may well have been sung at weddings, for the need for entertainment on such occasions is attested by the story of Jgs 14:10-18. The Song itself however is neither a wedding liturgy nor about a wedding as such. Indeed only two passages speak about marriage directly, the first of which (3:7-11) is metaphorical and the second of which (8:8-9) concerns not the beloved but her little sister. Indeed the Song remains remarkably free of the institution, for the diversity of themes and motifs make it quite impossible to situate the lovers either in the context of marriage or betrothal; the element of secrecy in the refrain, 'Turn my love, be like a gazelle or a young stag' (2:17; 8:14) and the fact that the beloved is subject to the authority of her brothers in 1:6-7 make it unlikely that the lovers are married. On the other hand hints of the consummation of the relationship (5:1; 6:3) would seem to preclude betrothal. Neither are the hopes of marriage ever alluded to. There is no mention of fertility or prosperity anywhere in the Song, except negatively, as regards prosperity in 8:7.

Structural approaches have tackled the question of whether the Song is an anthology or a unity, and if a unity what kind of unity, progressive or schematic.

Proponents of the anthological view have based their arguments upon a number of criteria, yet there is no consensus as to where poems begin and end. The consequence is that a great deal of discrepancy exists in the number of units proposed, ranging from five (Robert 1936) to fifty-two (Krinetzki 1981). Falk (1982, 69) looks for changes in setting, situation, tone and speaker to indicate unit divisions. Gordis (1974, 18, 21-24) adds to these, form and language. The component genres of the Song have been fully discussed by Horst (1935) and then by Krinetzki (1981). Horst proposes eight poetic forms¹⁷, Krinetzki proposes eleven.¹⁸

The tendency of the anthological approach to fragment the Song into countless independent units has been opposed by those who seek to prove that it is a schematic unity, a unity governed by some overall design. The suggestion of Wetzstein (1873) that the seven units of the Song correspond to the seven days of the wedding celebrations has already been considered.

¹⁷ The genres identified by Horst are the Song of Admiration (1:9-11,15; 2:1-3; 4:9-11; 6:10; 7:7-10), Comparisons (1:13f; 4:12-15) and Allegories (6:2), the Descriptive Song (4:1-7; 6:4a,5b-7; 5:10-16; 7:1-6), Self Description (1:5f; 8:8-10), the Vaunt Song (6:8f; 8:11f), the Jest (1:7f), the Description of Experience (3:1-4; 5:2-7; 6:11f) and the Song of Desire (2:4f).

¹⁸ The genres identified by Krinetzki are slightly different. They are Song of Admiration (1:9-11,15-17; 2:1-3; 4:10-11; 6:4-5b etc.). Image Songs which may either be metaphorical (1:13-14), comparative (4:13-15) or allegorical (1:12), Songs of Description (3:6-8,9-10; 4:1-7,8-9 etc.), Self Descriptions (1:5-6; 8:8-10), Boast Songs (6:8-9; 8:11-12); the Tease (1:7-8), Dialogues (4:16-5:1d; 5:8-16 etc.), Descriptions of Experience (2:8-9, 10-13; 3:1-4 etc.), Songs of Yearning (1:2-4; 2:4-5 etc.), the Adjuration Song (2:7; 3:5; 8:4) and the Summons to Joy (3:10e-11; 5:1e-f).

More recently scholars have applied rhetorical and structural analysis in order to prove the same case. According to this methodology, it is no longer shifts in genre, setting, speaker or tone or even shifts in linguistic data which are the signs of the beginning of a unit. Instead stylistic devices such as chiasmus, refrains and repetition are considered to be primary in structuring the Song. Rather than follow the natural breaks in the dialogue, intuitively grasped by shifts in theme, speaker, setting or mood, their concern is with the establishment of objective criteria for poetic divisions. Angénieux (1968, 87-140) emphasises the role of various kinds of refrains in structuring the text.¹⁹ Shea (1980, 378-396) argues for a chiastic structure for the Song.²⁰ Exum (1973, 47-49) endeavours to establish the existence of six parallel poems within a schematic unity.²¹

The strength of these analyses is in the discernment of such stylistic devices as repetition, paronomasia and chiasmus and the extent of their contribution to the unity of the text. The weakness however is in trying to make stylistic rhetorical features responsible for the structure of the text, with little regard for content. As Murphy (1990, 64) has pointed out 'thematic and verbal units' are also needed 'to sustain a viable sense of literary structure'. Fox (1985, 209) put it another way. According to him a schema is only useful if it facilitates the task of interpretation. The schemas referred to above only seem to complicate it.

¹⁹ These are 'initial and final refrains', 'refrains of time and place' and 'secondary refrains'. Along with 'distinctive themes' and 'initial and final themes', they structure the text.

²⁰ The chiastic structure is built upon a number of correspondences 1:2-2:2 with 8:6-14, 2:3-17 with 7:11-8:5 and 3:1-4:16 with 5:1-7:10.

²¹ They are 1:2-2:6 and 8:4-14; 2:7-3:5 and 5:2-6:3; 3:6-8:2; 8:5-14.

Elliott (1989) has remarked the excesses of structural and rhetorical studies while continuing to argue for the schematic unity of the Song. She identifies a six-part macro-structure on the basis of refrains which, though well integrated, constitute poetic divisions and act as hinges between parts. She also draws attention to correspondences between these units, particularly at the level of shared vocabulary. She does however add the warning that 'it is impossible to discern a neat mechanical organisation whereby the six parts fall into three sets of perfectly matched pairs' (1989, 215).²² In so doing she argues for a more organic unity than her predecessors. Indeed it is precisely to account for this unity that is her aim. Moreover unlike Angénieux, Shea and Exum she acknowledges the importance of content for the meaning of the Song. She describes the meaning as the result of "poetic structure and content working together" (1989, 34).

Among those who argue for the unity of the Song in terms of a progression is Fox (1985). He is less interested in establishing clear-cut poetic divisions than in emphasising the continuity of the Song which he describes as a 'meandering river' (1985, 225). 'It flows continuously yet twists and turns at regular intervals. Sometimes sharp bends mark out short sections of flow; sometimes the river flows straight for a longer stretch before turning'. He identifies a number of signals which indicate a pause in the Song's movement - a change of scene or of theme, a prominent phrase which rounds off the passage or the suggestion of the

²² The divisions are the following; 1:2-2:5; 2:8-3:4; 3:6-5:1; 5:2-6:2; 6:4-8:2; 8:5-14.

imminent fulfilment of desire - each of which must be discerned intuitively in context.

Much more of Fox's argument concerns the repeated words and phrases which issue from the lovers lips. They make a powerful case for the Song's unity. These fall into two broad categories, repetends and associative sequences,²³ the essential characteristic of each of which is repetition. According to Fox they also disclose the sequential character of the Song; such repetitions have a cumulative effect, preparing for the climatic statement about love's power towards the end of the Song (8:6).

My own thesis joins the debate at this point. It does not seek to get behind the text to resolve questions of date, authorship or social provenance. Indeed I have tried to show the complexity of these issues and the danger of trying to interpret the Song in terms of external factors. Nor do I accept an anthological view of the Song which tends to atomise the Song into a multiplicity of component parts. Rather, with Fox (1985) and Elliott (1989) I wish to affirm that the Song is a unity on the basis of the extent of repetition evident there. Furthermore I wish to argue that this unity is psychological, for in this way the shifts in speaker, setting, tone and theme begin to make sense. The poet is interested not so much in what the lovers do as in what they feel. What they feel,

²³ Repetends are those phrases and sentences which recur 'in the same or in somewhat varied form in different parts of the book' (Fox 1985, 209). They are to be distinguished from refrains which normally recur at a fixed interval and in a fixed form. Associative sequences are those groups of words, sentences or motifs 'which recur in the same order even though that order does not seem required by narrative sequence or logical continuity'. (1985, 215).



he expresses in terms of the multiplicity of images by means of which the lovers address each other. These images and their relationship to each other are the subject of this thesis.

The way has been opened up to a certain extent by Grober (1984, 86-112) who, in his discussion of the lotus motif, has demonstrated the extraordinary cohesion of the Song at the level of its imagery. My task is to continue his work as regards the many other images which make up the Song and to try to classify them.

The attempt to enter the Song by means of language and imagery should begin with a definition of terms. An image, in this context, does not refer to a psychological phenomenon, a mental representation but to 'a figure of speech expressing some similarity or analogy'.²⁴ In addition, poetic images are to be distinguished from dead metaphors and clichés which to different degrees conceal their metaphorical roots.²⁵ All language is metaphorical, yet poetic language has the capacity to speak about the familiar in new and innovative ways. It reaches out towards the unknown, the inaccessible, the unspeakable. That is why a multiplicity of images is necessary to express the beauty of the loved one and the yearning of the heart for his or her presence.

The poetic image is characterised by a certain number of traits which are important to the Song. The first is the concrete nature of the comparison. Metaphors and similes which are based on abstract thought are not strictly images according to Ullmann (1964, 178). As regards the Song, the concrete nature of the imagery draws the lovers and their environment into a close relationship with each other, for the lovers are depicted entirely in terms of the world they inhabit. In turn, this landscape is pervaded by an atmosphere of love.

²⁴ This is the definition of Watson (1984, 251).

²⁵ See Salle M^cFague, *Metaphorical Theology. Models of God in Religious Language*, London 1982, especially chaps 1-2.

The concrete nature of the imagery appeals not only to sight but to all the senses, giving not only psychological but sensual depth to the ensemble. Frequently images appeal to more than one of the senses. All five senses are engaged in the description of the garden (4:12-5:1). Elliott (1989, 241) describes the way in which the sensuality of the imagery is heightened by the process of reversal. 'At one moment the mouth is the site of taste, ('Your love is better than wine', 1:2) and at another the tongue and palate are themselves tasted ('Milk and honey are under your tongue', 4:11; 'His palate is most sweet', 5:16; 'Let your palate be like good wine', 7:10).' This happens on countless occasions throughout the Song, as shall be observed in the course of the thesis.

The second characteristic of the poetic image is an element of surprise, for the image is dependent for its effectiveness on the tension 'between thoughts of different things active together' (Richards 1936, 93). F. Garcia Lorca, cited by Ullmann (1964, 174) describes the capacity of the poetic image to embrace different worlds as 'an equestrian leap'.

The surprising nature of the Song's imagery has given rise to a debate as to its interpretation. Segal (1962, 470-90) has described the imagery of the Song as 'playful banter' (1962, 485);

'Only as playful banter can be rationally explained the grotesque description of the lover to the damsel, of her neck as 'like the tower of David built for an armoury', of her nose 'as the tower of Lebanon which looketh toward Damascus', and of her head 'like Mount Carmel (iv 4, vii 5.6) and similar comical comparisons of her other limbs.'

Pope (1977, 465) resorts to a mythological interpretation to make sense of certain metaphors. Of 4:4 he writes, 'The size of the damsel's neck stretches poetic hyperbole a bit as applied to a peasant lass or any earthly creature ... If the lady is divine her proportions would not be abnormal'.

On the other hand Soulen (1967, 183-190) suggests that the imagery of the Song is not primarily representational but presentational. It is not designed to describe physical features such as height or colour but to convey the emotion of the lover before his or her loved one and to arouse similar emotion in the hearer. Of the imagery, he writes (1964, 190);

'The writer is not concerned that his hearers be able to retell in descriptive language the particular qualities or appearance of the woman described; he is much more interested that they share his joy, awe and delight.'

H-P Müller (1984) also goes some way in this direction. He argues that in many cases the *tertium comparationis* is aesthetic rather than literal and that it is the task of poetic language to awaken the reader to an awareness of the numinous. In the Song it is mediated by means of imagery which is laden with mythological reminiscences.

Fox (1985, 274-77), in his analysis of the problem, is careful to keep objective and subjective aspects together. He insists upon the objective feature which each image has in common with its referent,²⁶ making that particular

²⁶ A number of technical terms are used to describe the component parts of imagery. Alternative to the terms 'image' and 'referent' are 'vehicle' and 'tenor'

image, rather than any other, uniquely appropriate. He makes particular reference to the descriptive songs in which each part of the body in turn is the subject of detailed description. The very form of these *wasfs* encourages the reader to expect some correspondence between image and referent:

‘The poet does not merely heap up lovely images (or images of lovely things) to overwhelm us with imagined sense - impressions, but rather seeks a particular image for each part of the body and organises these images in an itemized list. The one-to-one correspondences between images and parts of the body make us feel that some quality peculiar to each part, and not just a general feeling of affection, calls forth these images.’ (Fox 1985, 275)

Thus it is that a scarlet thread is chosen to describe the beloved’s lips in 4:3 rather than a flock of ewes moving down Mount Gilead. The image of the flock of ewes is appropriate to her tumultuous curls (4:1).

Fox also recognises that this objective sensory resemblance alone does not explain the effectiveness of the imagery, but that this resemblance is necessary to make the metaphor possible. The emotional impact of the imagery of which Soulen (1967) spoke comes not from this common ground but from the metaphoric distance which is created when two very different objects are juxtaposed, a scarlet thread and the beloved’s lips, for example. The effect that this juxtaposition has upon the reader is to convey something which cannot

(Richards 1963).

otherwise be put into words. In the Song, it conveys the immeasurable beauty of the loved one.

Fox's analysis, in my opinion, comes closest to the description of metaphor by Ullmann (1974, 174-201). It also constitutes the basis of my methodology, namely to try to discern the nature of the objective resemblance and the relevance of certain associations. Keel (1986, 36) proposes a 'dynamic interpretation' which requires the reader to determine the associations of both elements in the comparison. He reminds us that both image and referent may have associations in the biblical world; the eyes (1:5; 4:1; 5:12) for example, are the medium of emotional communication (Ezekiel 1:7; Daniel 10:6) just as the neck (4:4) is associated with pride (Isaiah 3:16).

Much of Keel's interpretation however ties the Song rather too closely to the mythological inheritance of the Ancient Near East, for his interpretation is based upon iconography and the premise that cultural tradition is more formative than nature in the conception of a work of art. In view of the longevity of certain cultural images in the Ancient Near East, he considers archaeology to be more important than the landscape in the search for sources of the Song's motifs. Iconographic sources reveal a wealth of mythological symbolism which Keel relates to the images of the Song on the basis of a common cultural inheritance.²⁷ These resonances however must remain secondary, for no explicit

²⁷ The comparison of the beloved's eyes to doves, for example in 1:15; 4:1; 5:12 depends upon the association of doves with the love goddess in Ancient Near Eastern iconography. They were her special messengers and hence are to be understood as 'messengers of love' in the Song.

reference is made to mythology apart from 8:6 concerning the power of love over death.



Ben Ent

CHAPTER 2

COURTLY IMAGERY

The question of the social provenance of the Song and its relationship to the pre-exilic court or to post-exilic institutions is a different one from that of the use of courtly imagery in the Song. The aim of this chapter is not primarily to speculate as to date or social provenance but to examine the way in which courtly images are employed in order to express the admiration of the lover before his or her loved one. The most prominent of these images is that of the king. There is also his female entourage, the daughters of Jerusalem. Together they create a courtly ambience, reminiscent of the reign of Solomon. All kinds of other images of wealth and splendour gather around this nexus, gemstones and precious metals, oils and spices, veils and mantles and images of monumentality. Each of these will be examined in turn.

The image of the king has drawn considerable attention to itself, particularly in scholarship undertaken by proponents of the various dramatic, historical and liturgical theories. Each considers the motif of kingship to be in some way central to the interpretation of the Song.

As regards the dramatic theory, Delitzsch's (1875) interpretation implies that the lover is to be identified with King Solomon. This interpretation however is weakened by the distance which emerges between the beloved's lover and Solomon in the final verses, 8:10-12. The alternative three-character drama proposed by Driver (1913) is equally unacceptable, for it distances the lover from the language of kingship which is attributed to a third party, King Solomon.

As already argued in the Introduction (i), the clearest way in which both of these suggestions fail is in their imposition of an external framework upon an internal drama. Far from designating an external reality, the image of the king is part of a constellation of images which chart the passage of the beloved's heart. It is primarily a metaphor used to describe the awe in which the beloved holds her lover (1:4,12; 3:12).

Proponents of historicising interpretations fall into similar difficulties for their interpretation depends on King Solomon being presented in a consistently good light, he and his new spouse being the subject of the Song. This consistency is not forthcoming however as already suggested, for in 8:8-10 King Solomon is

distanced from the lovers.²⁸ The aim of the references to King Solomon is not to involve him in the dramatic pastoral envisaged by Delitzsch (1875, 18) nor to celebrate his marriage to an Egyptian princess (1 Kgs 3:1) as suggested by Theodore of Mopsuestia (PG 87, 27-214) and later by Tournay (1982, 54-67). Rather the historical figure has become a metaphor, capable of evoking all the splendour of an anonymous, yet pre-eminent loved one.

For those who consider the roots of the Song to be in a ritual whereby the reigning monarch marries a votary of the fertility goddess, the image is of great significance indeed, for it constitutes an important clue to the origin of the Song as a semi-liturgical text. The interpretations of Meek (1922) and of Wittekindt (1925) imply that the king is to be identified with the god Tammuz, whilst that of Neuschotz de Jassy (1914) refers the reader to Egypt, to the god Osiris. Kramer (1969) argues that Tammuz was not in fact a deity but a king from Sumer who, according to legend, became Inanna's spouse. Henceforth the *hieros gamos* tradition developed in such a way that each succeeding king was symbolically identified with him. Kramer (1969, 89) suggests that the Song may have accompanied the Sacred Marriage between the king and a votary of Astarte. The imagery of kingship, according to this interpretation, refers to and comments upon the actions of the king. References to Solomon do not contradict this

²⁸ This did not deter a later editor from ascribing the book to King Solomon. His intentions however were not poetic but practical, namely to make a claim for the sapiential character of the Song (cf. Audet 1955, 79-81, Childs 1979, 573-576). According to Fox (1985, 95) it marks the first step towards the appropriation of the Song by religion.

interpretation, for according to Kramer (1969, 489) the reference in 1 Kgs 11:5 suggests that the goddess Astarte was worshipped by King Solomon.

Each of these readings assumes a cultic background to the Song in spite of the fact that the lovers never show any sign of concern with fertility or procreation, which is the aim of the Sacred Marriage rite. If the roots of the Song are in the Sacred Marriage rite, then it is in a subordinate way, in so far as it draws on the common currency of love language which pertains to sacral and secular circles alike.²⁹ The language of regality is best understood in its plain sense, namely as part of that rich and varied hyperbolic language by means of which the lovers of the Song sing each other's praise. To delight in each other is clearly their chief aim.

At least in the early chapters of the Song, regal imagery is particularly associated with the lover. In 1:12, the metaphor of the king is used by the beloved of her lover as a way of expressing her awe and admiration. It also permits her to express his incomparability which makes her assume that he is loved by all (1:4cde);

'In you we will rejoice and be glad,
we will praise your love more than wine.
How right they are to love you!

²⁹ Commenting on the cultic interpretation Eissfeldt (1965, 489) writes. '... in Israel, as elsewhere in the world, the language of lovers has been influenced by mythical and cultic diction ... just as it is true that myth has made borrowings from erotic poetry'.

In 1:12, as in 1:4, the image of the king is associated with the heady fragrances which in 1:4 convey his presence to her. Whereas in 1:4 the movement is inside to the king's chamber, in 1:12 the fragrance of the beloved's nard transports them from the king's couch to the vineyards of Ein-Gedi.

In the course of 1:12-14 regal and natural imagery come together. The image of the king is again a way of expressing the esteem in which the lover is held.

A third regal image, that of 2:4, belongs to this same imaginative field. Although the king himself is not mentioned, the image of the banner is sufficient to evoke a regal milieu. The preceding verses (1:15-2:3) are dominated by natural imagery, yet the image of the banner fits into this context quite naturally, thanks to the harmonising of these two settings in 1:13-14. Moreover there is an imaginative connection between 1:5-2:3 and 2:4, for the image of the beloved sitting in the shade of the apricot tree (2:3) anticipates the image of the banner raised over the beloved's head (2:4). Both are images of overshadowing of great tenderness. It is by means of these contrasting yet complimentary images that the lover declares his love for the beloved.

The word לגל has frequently been discussed. More recent commentators Gordis (1974, 81), Pope (1977, 325-376), Falk (1982, 115), Fox (1985, 108) and Murphy (1990, 132) relate the noun to the Akkadian root *dagālu*, 'to see' or 'look at'. The image therefore is of the lover who looks lovingly upon the beloved. Pope (1977, 376) is able to make the interpretation yet more precise, for

according to him, the noun *dagālu* also designates ‘intent’. In other words, the lover looks on his beloved with desire.

Apart from 5:10 however, which will be dealt with separately, on every instance in which the verb appears in the OT it is specifically in a military context (Num 1:52; 2:2-3,10,17-18,25,34; 10:18,22,25; Ps 20:6). Indeed the ancient versions consistently take דגל to mean a ‘military unit’. LXX reads *tagma*, ‘a unit drawn up in military order’. AV, RSV and JB translate the noun by ‘ensign’ or ‘banner’ on the grounds that the link between the Akkadian root and the military unit of the versions was the banner or ensign by means of which the unit could be identified. It is evidently a banner (and not a military unit!) that is raised in Ps 20:6.

The associations of this image are moreover extremely rich. A banner is raised to mark capture or ownership. Here, it conveys the lover’s pride in his beloved. It is also a sign of the presence of the one it represents and of identification, on the part of the flag bearer, with him. It suggests that her lover is not only her captor but most importantly, her king.

Roles are reversed in 7:6. Now her lover is likened to a king who is rendered powerless by the very sight of his beloved’s hair (7:6c). Consequently he ceases to exercise his kingship and it is she who takes control. Thus it is that the attributes of kingship are henceforth applied to her. She is ‘crowned’ (7:6a)

with a head of 'purple'³⁰ (7:6a) which 'binds' (7:6c) her lover. The power of her hair to move her lover to this extent is reminiscent of Onirenska's poem (Carmi 1981, 465);

'O peerless beauty, veil your hair,
lest you play havoc with the world,
without lifting a finger'.

Thus far, the image of kingship has been applied to the lover as a way of conveying the beloved's admiration. 7:6 however alerts the reader to the presence of another theme which grows in the wake of the first, namely that of the gradual ascent of the beloved to a position of quasi-queenship. This development does not depend on the framework of a liturgy or drama for its meaning. It is simply implied by a shift in the balance of the images which make up the Song. The story remains metaphor.

The 'story' begins in 1:5. The precise intention of the verse has been widely discussed. The debate focuses on the function of the *waw*, whether it is meant to establish a contrast between blackness and beauty (Fox 1985, 101) or whether it emphatically asserts that black is beautiful (Falk 1982, 110). Fox considers the tone to be sheepish. Falk reads it as an outburst of pride.

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Purple (ָרָאָה) was used in the veil of Solomon's temple (2 Chron 3:14). As well as symbolising divinity (cf. Exod 26:1,36; 27:16; 28:5,6,8,15,33), this expensive fabric also denoted royalty.

The ambiguity persists in the relationship of the similes to each other. Interpretation varies depending on whether one considers them to be complimentary or contrasting images. Fox considers the reference to loveliness in 1:5a to be parenthetical. Consequently he considers both of the images which follow (1:5cd) to describe her swarthinness. Falk, on the other hand, who gives equal weight to both attributes in 1:5a, understands the similes of 1:5cd to explore ideas of blackness and loveliness in turn.

The issue is complicated further by the suggestion that the MT הַלְלִיכָה be repointed to הַלְלִיכָה , the name of ^{an} Arabian tribe, attested in Assyrian and South Arabic sources (Pope 1977, 520). The similes of 1:5cd would thereby stand in a relationship of synonymous parallelism with each other, comparing tribes. Fox accepts this emendation. Falk rejects it.

Fox would seem to be right when he argues that there would be little point in explaining how she came to be dark were she not ashamed of her colour. I disagree with him however regarding the relationship of the similes to each other. They too are antithetical. This is the position of Falk.

The reason why I have sided with Falk regarding the relationship of the similes to each other is because the success of the parallelism of 1:5cd depends on the juxtaposition of two entirely different ways of life, nomadic (1:5c) and urban (1:5d). Together they convey her vulnerability, as she struggles to preserve a sense of self-worth in the face of the sudden realisation that the daughters of Jerusalem are so different from herself. The focus of these doubts is her

complexion which is a source of shame (1:6ab). In opposition to these negative feelings however, is a quiet confidence in her own worth, rendering her as splendid as Solomon's curtains and as secure as the king who dwells within (1:5d).

Moreover in the beloved, the two poles of society, represented by the desert nomads (1:5c) and King Solomon (1:5d) find coherence, for she is also an outsider (1:6) who falls in love with a king (1:4).

The temporary loss of balance she experiences in 1:5-6 is resolved by the decision to go in search of her lover (1:7). With that, the struggle is over, and hope and expectancy gain a victory over fear and shame.

A search ensues and king and court cede before the emergence of a pastoral scene (1:7-8). Before it has reached its turn however, her lover breaks his silence and interrupts her search with a declaration in praise of her beauty (1:9-11). Her vulnerability is instantly forgotten. It is swept aside by the comparison of the beloved to a mare of Pharaoh's chariotry, an image which emphasises her nobility and his pride. Not only does the image recall the rather ostentatious reign of Solomon when trade in horses was carried on with Egypt (1 Kgs 10:26,29) but it brings to mind those ceremonial occasions in which chariots were paraded simply for display (1 Kgs 1:5; 2 Kgs 5:9; Jer 22:4; Isa 66:20).

The theme of the beloved's redoubtability gains momentum as the Song progresses. The first hint is given in 4:4 where her slender neck is described in terms of a tower on which warriors hang their shields, presumably a reference to

her beads. These are a part of a necklace composed of several layers or strands. This is the implication of the form לַתְּלַפְעָרָת which Honeyman (1949, 51) related to the Arabic cognate لَفَعَ 'to arrange in courses'. The image draws attention to her formidable inaccessibility and her awesome reserve. Although no clue is given as to the identification of the tower, the reference to David (4:4a) is designed to strengthen the beloved's association with the Israelite monarchy.

It is in chapter 6, as the Song draws to a climax, that the beloved reaches a position of pre-eminence, for she is not only associated with the royal cities of Tirzah and Jerusalem (6:4) but with the brilliance of the cosmos itself (6:10). She, who is not part of the royal entourage but who is infinitely more precious to her lover than any member thereof (6:8), is praised by the women of the court as if she were their queen (6:9). No longer is she despised and outcast (cf. 1:5-6) but she ascends to a position of pre-eminence, she who is 'lovely as the moon' (6:10b) and 'radiant as the sun' (6:10c). As such, she is redoubtable, 'terrifying as an army with banners' (6:10d).

The contrast with 1:6 is striking. There, she pleads with the daughters of Jerusalem not to look at her on account of the swarthiness of her skin which the sun has caused, literally by 'looking'³¹ at her. Both the daughters of Jerusalem and the sun consume her by their stares. In so doing they repeat the violence of her brothers which literally 'burned' against her.³² Now, in 6:10, the beloved is

³¹ As argued in the Notes to the Text (1) the verb רָאָה literally means 'to look'.

³² The verb הָרָה means 'to burn' or 'be angry'.

identified with the clarity and strength of the sun so as to be a light for others, so as to draw their gaze. Indeed sometimes the presence of the beloved is overpowering (cf. 6:5);

‘Turn your eyes away from me;
they dazzle me’

The phrase ‘awesome as an army with banners’ (6:10) has been the subject of much discussion. Those who make the feminine plural participle נִרְגְּלוֹת correspond to the meaning of the Akkadian cognate *dagālu* and translate ‘as these great sights’ (Gordis 1953, 91) or ‘as visions’ (Murphy 1990, 175) sacrifice the potency of image whose military associations are well attested in the OT. They have already been enumerated.³³ Both Jewish and Christian traditions accept this reading. LXX translates ‘ranked phalanxes’, Ibn Ezra renders ‘camps in battle array’ and Vg translates ‘camps in battle array’. Moreover the adjective נִרְאָה, “awesome” which characterises the beloved (6:4,10) is well suited to a military context, for apart from the Song it occurs only in Hab 1:2 where it is used of the warring ravages of the Chaldeans.

Several scholars, sensing the inadequacy of the rendering ‘as these great sights’ are quick to find concrete images as a substitute. From a consideration of the context of 6:10, Rudolph (1942-43, 162) and Goitein (1965, 221) decided that the phrase was related to astronomy. Rudolph translates the phrase by ‘heavenly

³³ See the discussion of the noun נִרְגְּלוֹת in the same chapter.

bodies'. Goitein translates it by 'splendid as the brilliant stars'. Gerleman (1965, 183) argues for a 'mirage'.

There is another reason however why one should be reluctant to renounce the military associations of the metaphor, for deep-seated in the Ancient Near East is the association of love with war. Indeed it is evident in 8:6 in the description of love which sends out 'shafts of fire' (8:6e). In the background is the memory of the great love goddess, associated with fertility on the one hand and with war and pestilence on the other.³⁴ The beloved displays none of the excesses of Anat, but she does share with her, not only tenderness, but also strength.³⁵

There remains the important question of the relationship of Solomon to the Song. As already suggested, the ascription of the Song to Solomon is most likely the work of a later editor who was keen to associate the Song with the sapiential tradition of which Solomon was the patron according to 1 Kgs 4:29 and the stories of 1 Kgs 3:16,28 and 1 Kgs 10:1-10. Of the 3000 proverbs and 1005 songs attributed to him (1 Kgs 5:12) this song is hailed to be the very best.

In the Song itself however, Solomon's position is much more ambiguous, for the historical figure has become primarily a literary motif. Associated first

³⁴ Pope (1977, 670) recalls the representation in Egyptian iconography of the love goddess standing on a horse bearing a lotus flower and a serpent in her hand. She is flanked on the one side by Rešep, the god of pestilence and war, and on the other by an ithyphallic min.

³⁵ Anat's warring exploits are recounted in KTU 1;3, ii 4-32.

with one lover and then with the other, he is finally distanced from both (8:10-12) so as to disclose the inadequacy of all language to speak of the heights and depths of love.

The 'curtains of Solomon' (1:5d) constitute a positive element in the beloved's assessment of her appearance. If she is dark 'like the tents of Kedar' (1:5c), she is also beautiful like the richly coloured tapestries of the King (1:5d). Solomon's standing in this case helps to confirm her own.

Solomon himself appears in 3:11. There it is the nobility of the lover which the royal personage conveys. Previous to this appearance is a description of his litter (3:7-10).

The problem which has dogged interpreters is how 3:6 relates to 3:7. The difficulty is the interrogative pronoun *מִי* which governs feminine singular demonstrative pronoun *זֶה* and the feminine singular plural participle *מְקַטְרֶת*. The pronoun usually refers to a person, here the beloved. Indeed when the question is repeated in 8:5, it is to the beloved that the question undoubtedly refers. The interest of the following verses however (3:7-10) is not explicitly the beloved, but Solomon's litter. The beloved herself is never mentioned.

Independent of this difficulty, there are certain traits which mark out 3:7-11 from the rest of the Song. Whereas throughout the Song the lovers praise each other directly (eg. 1:15-16; 2:1-3), here exceptionally the description is of something rather than of someone. Moreover 3:11 clearly refers to a wedding,

the only reference to a wedding in all the Song. Finally, Solomon is the centre of attention in 3:11, contrary to the very subordinate role he plays throughout the Song. These are among the features which suggest that 3:7-11 is part of an epithalamium composed for the occasion of Solomon's wedding. The difficulty of squaring 3:6 with 3:7 may well be a clue to the limits of the insertion, for it is possible that these verses do not naturally belong together but have been made to fit on the basis of the feminine singular subject which governs both the beloved in 3:6, and Solomon's litter in 3:7.³⁶ Moreover it is fortunate that whilst *ʔ* normally refers to a person, it may also be translated 'what' (GHB 142, 148b). The poem seems reluctant to clarify the ambiguity. Thus it is that a number of interpretations suggest themselves. I will limit myself to the exploration of two.

It may be that the pronoun *ʔ* does indeed refer to the beloved who ascends from the desert (3:6a) to Jerusalem (3:10e-11). So radiant is she that she emerges from the desert in a column of smoke, an image which reminds the reader of the presence of God with his people as they travelled through the wilderness (Exod 13:21-2). As the procession advances a litter, Solomon's litter comes into view (3:7). The exclamation, 'Look! It is the litter of Solomon' (3:7a) does not contradict the ascent of the beloved alluded to in 3:6a. It merely makes it more precise. Whereas before only vague forms were visible through a smoke screen of exotic perfumes (3:6b-d), now a litter comes into view. It is identified as Solomon's litter, hinting that perhaps the woman alluded to in 3:6 is his bride, hidden inside.

³⁶ Gordis (1974, 56) takes a different view. He regards 3:6-11 as a single unit and the oldest datable unit in the Song.

King Solomon waits in Jerusalem (3:11) for the arrival of his bride who makes her way accompanied by a royal escort (3:7bc-8).³⁷ He has sent his own litter to fetch her and warriors to guard it. Though his wealth is ostensibly put to her service, she is increasingly obscured by it, for the detailed description of Solomon's litter (3:9-10d) takes precedence over the incumbent. By the time the litter has reached Jerusalem and the daughters of that city are told to go and see their king on his wedding day (3:10e-11), his bride has been overshadowed completely by his splendour.

The description of 8:5 is all the more remarkable by comparison. There, the beloved leans on her lover as an equal and together they ascend from the desert, their only recourse against the dangers of the desert being love.³⁸ Gone is the pomp and ceremony of the first ascent which drew attention above all to the wealth and splendour of the king. Now love alone makes its courageous ascent.

³⁷ The journey is reminiscent of the journey Rebekah made to meet her husband Isaac (Gen 24:61). She was accompanied not by a military convoy, but by Abraham's servant. Murphy (1990, 51) compares 3:6-11 to Inanna's appearance as a warrior as described in the Iddin-Dagan hymn, quoted by Jacobsen (1987, 116);

'They (themselves) are girt
with implements of battle,
- before holy Inanna, before her eyes,
they are parading -
spears, the arms of battle,
are in their hands ...'

³⁸ The desert, in the OT, is a figure of desolation, a place of waste and chaos (Lam 4:3; Ps 102:6). It is the place that awaits transformation as a sign of God's redeeming power (Isa 35:1-2; 40:3-5).

There is another way of reading 3:6-11 however. If the interrogative pronoun *מִי* refers to Solomon's litter, then the entire passage (3:6-11) honours Solomon. No reference having been made to anyone else, it is likely that he is the incumbent. Understood thus, the passage depends on the systematic advance of the royal cortège for its dramatic intensity.

Whereas only vague forms are at first visible (3:6), soon a litter becomes visible (3:7). Whereas at first the shimmering silhouette in the distance gives the impression of a theophany (3:6), soon details of a carriage come into view (3:7-10d). The climax of the description is a glimpse of the king himself (3:10d-11). The chiasmic structure of 3:10d-11a draws attention to the excitement of this new possibility.³⁹ Moreover the repetition of certain roots lends solemnity to the charge to the daughters of the city. In 3:11bc, two forms of the root *נָטַע* are juxtaposed, whilst in 3:10e-11a, 3:11bc and 3:11de the repetition of the same root creates a strong bond between colons. Alliteration too plays its part, particularly in 3:11ef. There, the repetition of soft, liquid sounds (*ל, נ, נ*) conveys the delight of the entire company.

Whether the litter is intended to convey the lover or the beloved, the poet clearly delights in describing the royal escort which accompanies it (3:6-8). The measured qinah metre (3+2) which characterises the description, adds solemnity to the scene. This air of gravity is consolidated by means of imagery which uses

³⁹ On the basis of an emended text (see *Notes to the Text* (1)) chiasmus creates a simple ABB¹A¹ structure;

'Daughters of Jerusalem see, look daughters of Zion'

a single root in different ways (גִּבְרִי 3:7c - מִגְבְּרִי 3:7d; חֹזֶבֶר 3:8a - חֹזֶב 3:8c).

With the description of the palanquin (3:9-10d) the orderliness of the description of the escort (3:6-8) breaks down. Not only does the metre become irregular (3+3, 3+2, 2+3) but a multiplicity of parallel images describe the litter's component parts. Image after image is piled up in order to insist upon the splendour of the litter belonging to the king. The word used to describe the carriage is itself exotic. Whereas in 3:7a it is described by the ordinary word for 'couch' or 'bed' (מִטָּה), in 3:9a it is the Greek loan-word אֶפֶסֶר יָן, 'palanquin' that is used. The sheer exuberance of this imagery rivals the most enthusiastic song of praise.

Solomon appears after a long absence in 8:11-12. 8:11 begins in the formulaic style of a parable, reminding the reader of the Song of the vineyard of Isa 5:1-7 which begins in a similar way. In both poems, the vineyard and its owner are introduced (8:11a cf. Isa 5:1bc) and a narrative with symbolic meaning ensues (8:11c-12 cf. Isa 5:1c-7). In Isaiah, the allegory is explained (Isa 5:7). In the Song however the enigma remains.

The difficulty concerns the identity of the speaker. This is a question which will be discussed in greater detail in Vines and Vineyards. Suffice to say that it is likely that the speaker is the beloved, who is thankful that she at last is her own person. Each detail in the passage contributes to the negative portrayal of the king, for against the independance of the beloved is set the enslavement

of his wives whose destiny is bound up with the wealth of the king. The connection between wealth and women is underlined by the place-name, Baal-Hamon, which may be translated 'lord of a multitude' or 'possessor of wealth'.⁴⁰

The significance of the parable is that by means of it, the limits of metaphorical speech are laid bare. The distancing of Solomon from the lovers towards the end of the Song, discloses that, in the end, the metaphor of kingship is inadequate to describe this great love. Love is not for sale, even to the most rich and powerful. The parable restates the aphorism of 8:7 in other words.

⁴⁰ The translation, 'possessor of wealth', is that of Fox (1985, 174).

Suggestions as to the identification of the women encapsulate the variety of interpretation as regards the Song. Origen identified them with the Jewish people (Lawson 1957, 92), and the Targum with the 'assembly of Israel' (Sperber 1963, 130). To proponents of the dramatic theory, they are 'the ladies of the court' (Driver 1894, 413) and to those who consider the Song to be a collection of wedding songs, the bride's attendants (Budde 1910, 3). Finally, according to the cultic theory, they are the attendants of the fertility goddess (Meek 1956, 114).

The daughters of Jerusalem are first and foremost the female inhabitants of the city whose name they bear, just as the 'daughters of Shiloh' (Judg 21:21) are the female inhabitants of that place. Robert (1963, 70) suggests that the designation originates in the personification of the community as 'mother'. Jerusalem, or rather Zion, is frequently described as 'mother' to its 'sons' and 'daughters' in the writings of the post-exilic prophets (Isa 51:20; 60:4; Lam 1:4).

Although the daughters of Jerusalem are absent from the OT apart from the Song (1:5; 2:7; 3:5,10; 5:8,16; 8:4), the daughters of Zion, which is another name for them (3:11), are not. They are extremely severely criticised in Isa 3:16-24 on account of their pride;

‘The Lord said;

because the daughters of Zion are haughty

and walk with outstretched necks,

glancing wantonly with their eyes,

mincing along as they go,
tinkling with their feet;
the Lord will smite with a scab
the heads of the daughters of Zion,
and the Lord will lay bare their secret parts'

On the basis of this kind of characterisation, Keel (1986, 56) assumes that the daughters of Jerusalem were the young, eligible women of the day, pampered and preoccupied with beauty and love, as were the Parisian women that appear in 19th century French novels. He may well be right, but in fact very little information is given about them by the Song. There, they remain anonymous and undifferentiated. Indeed on the only occasion on which they are invited to participate in her love story (5:8), they appear to be not only sceptical (5:9) but also rather stupid (6:1), offering to respond to her request for help only when her lover has already been found (6:2).

As Robert (1963, 70) and Murphy (1990, 84) have correctly suggested, the daughters of Jerusalem are a dramatic trait, a literary device which enables the beloved to explore her feelings more fully. If they are silent and irresponsive, revealing none of their feelings or values, it is only so that the beloved can better articulate her own.

The daughters of Jerusalem are addressed for the first time in 1:5-6. The beloved uses the pretext of their curiosity to present herself (1:5ab). She then proceeds to give a *resumé* of her family circumstances, for their fascination with

her swarthy complexion (1:6ab) is accompanied by the need to explain herself (1:6cd). Of the daughters of Jerusalem we know no more, except that they are not like her. They do however form a close parallel to her brothers, for the beloved perceives herself to be equally strange to both parties (1:6). The passage ends however, not with the daughters of Jerusalem nor with the beloved's brothers, but with the beloved (1:6e) who has never ceased to occupy the centre of the stage.

Although the daughters of Jerusalem are shadowy figures, they do have an important functional role to play in the Song. In a sense they are the ones who call it forth, for although the beloved's first concern is her lover with whom she is almost continually engaged in conversation, the daughters of Jerusalem constitute a kind of choir to whom the events of love are related. This accounts for the impossible simultaneity of the Song, the levelling of distinctions between past and present, absence and presence, for the Song is at once experienced with great immediacy by the lovers in the privacy of their world, and is related to the daughters of Jerusalem as if these events already belong to the past. Nowhere is this more apparent than in relation to the adjurations addressed to them. Each of these should be examined in turn.

The longing which moves the beloved to ask for apricots and raisin cakes in 2:5 is suddenly satisfied by the unexpected appearance of her lover in 2:6;⁴¹

⁴¹ The verse may alternatively be read as an expression of longing;
 'O that his left hand held my head
 and that his right hand embraced me'.

‘His left hand holds my head
and his right hand embraces me’

This statement conveys the all-sufficiency of his embrace. A number of elements help to convey the safety she feels in his arms. First of all there is the synonymous parallelism of 2:6ab which emphasises that she is completely enveloped by him. There is the alliteration of \aleph/\aleph which conveys his tenderness towards her. Finally, in both colons, the third person masculine singular suffix "ל" precedes the first person singular suffix "א" as if to underline his chevalrious conduct towards her. In every way, she is protected and encompassed by him, and as such, is lost to the world around.

Although there are no rubrics to suggest a change in scene, the reader is inclined to assume that such a shift has taken place. He is led to this conclusion not only by the self sufficiency of 2:6, but also by the way in which the previous scene comes to a close in 2:5c; an *inclusio* with 2:1 is created by the final word ($\aleph \aleph$) of 2:5c and a third colon (2:5c) breaks the binary pattern which has dominated thus far (2:1-4). Moreover the final colon (2:5c) is explanatory. It rounds off the section by stating the cause of the requests previously made (2:5ab).

Thus it is that most critics (Pope, Robert, Gordis, Murphy, Krinetzski) translate 2:6 in the way that I have done, so that it describes her lover's embrace. On the basis of this reading however, the juxtaposition of 2:6,7 is paradoxical for it suggests that the beloved is both absorbed in the lovers self-contained world, and that she is in dialogue with the wider world, represented by the daughters of

Jerusalem. This impossible simultaneity suggests that the entire sequence should be relegated to the past, were it not for the immediacy of the lovers experience which predominates. The alternative is to read the sequence (2:5-7) as an expression of longing, addressed to the daughters of Jerusalem in the absence of the loved one. This is the reading proposed by the RSV.

The next appearance of the adjuration - again in full - is in 3:5, following the narration of the beloved's search for her lover (3:1-4). It begins in the complete tense (3:4) and moves into the incomplete tense (3:4), as if to suggest that the search which seemed to belong to the past (3:1-3) is only now coming to an end.

In complete contrast to the previous passage (2:5-6) in which the present is jolted into the past, in this sequence the daughters of Jerusalem are the means by which past experience becomes present; the telling of the tale conjures up the presence of her lover so forcibly, that even now she endeavours to bring him home (3:4).

These passages show that the audience, constituted by the daughters of Jerusalem, is a catalyst both to her memories and to her longings. By means of their presence, dreams and reminiscences become vitally present, now. Their presence, most importantly, brings coherence to the shifting contours of the Song, for dream, which is indistinguishable from reality, past experience, which is indistinguishable from longing, is all related to them.

The adjuration appears in abridged form in 5:8. Preceding, is a narrative which describes a second night search (5:1-7), a search characterised by greater violence and less success than the first (3:1-4). She ends the tale with a summons to the daughters of Jerusalem which begins in the manner of previous adjurations, 'I adjure you ...' (5:8). It fails to reach its term however, for her lover is absent. Hence it is the motif of sickness (cf. 2:5c) which ensues. As in 2:5, it describes her great longing.

For the first time, the daughters of Jerusalem respond to the adjuration. They do so with slight scepticism, asking her what is so special about her lover that she should be so distraught by his absence (5:9). This question permits her to embark for the first and only time upon a lengthy description of him (5:10-16). She does so in the manner of the descriptive songs by means of which he so frequently praises her (4:1-5; 7:1-5). That they fail to co-operate with her, is a matter of indifference, for the importance of their presence lies in what their reticence allows her to say.⁴²

So present does he become to her in the course of the description that when the daughters of Jerusalem are finally convinced of his worth and offer to help her find him (6:1), she summarily dismisses them, and withdraws with him,

⁴² Comparable is the Sumerian song 'Message of Ludingira to his Mother' (Cooper 1971, 157-162). In this song a messenger is charged to deliver a greeting to the poet's mother. In order that he will recognise her, the poet engages in a lyrical description of the woman in question. The 'second sign' is particularly close in terms of its imagery to 5:10-16.

at least in her imagination, to their private world (6:2-3). Her sharp words to the daughters of Jerusalem conveniently bring the sequence to a conclusion.

It is notable how, on many occasions, the lovers seek each other, only to find each other and begin the search again. The motif takes the form of a narrative in 3:1-5 and a dialogue in 4:9-5:1. In 5:2-6:3 the presence of the daughters of Jerusalem (5:8,9; 6:1) binds together several different genres in the expression of this same motif - a narrative (5:2-7), a descriptive song (5:10-16) and a poem in praise of their unity (6:2-3). In addition to the cohesion which they create as listeners, they also assist the structural unity of the Song.

The final occasion on which the beloved challenges the daughters of Jerusalem, is 8:4. There, as in 2:7, the adjuration follows immediately upon a description of his embrace (cf. 2:6), itself apparently the realisation of a longing for his presence, expressed in terms of wanting to take him to her mother's house (8:2). As in 2:7, the adjuration effectively closes the scene, drawing a curtain over the lovers.

Each of the above-mentioned adjurations discloses retrospectively that the audience addressed by the beloved are the daughters of Jerusalem, even if these passages are primarily soliloquies (3:1-5,7-11; 5:2-8,10-16; 6:2) or dialogues with her lover (6:1-3).

Other passages too bear tell-tale signs of belonging to reported speech. The quoting phrase, 'My beloved spoke, saying to me' (2:10) is just enough to

indicate that the verses are conveyed second hand and that the events described consequently belong to the past. Their power however - like the passages preceding the adjurations - lies in their immediacy, in their capacity to convey the importance of the present moment, the lovers' 'now'. If they are reported to the daughters of Jerusalem therefore, it is not to relegate them to past experience, but to set them in a context which enables them to live again.

The role of the daughters of Jerusalem in making the lovers' dialogue live again gives us a clue to the function of the Song and to the particular role of the daughters of Jerusalem within it. Their role as confidantes to the beloved not only unifies the shifting contours of longing and reminiscence, but is the first step towards the retelling of the love story. Do we not detect their voice alongside that of lover and beloved in the recitation of the same?

There has been much debate as to the correct interpretation of the adjurations. The first bone of contention is the implication of the presence of gazelles and hinds as an integral part of the oath. This is a matter for the section entitled Animals and Birds. The second difficulty is the correct interpretation of the verb גַּלַּל which is repeated in simple (qal) then in intensive (polél) form. The translation of this verb depends on the interpretation of the subject כַּזְבִּיבִים , which also has caused problems. Every reader must try to pick his way through each of these difficulties.

Beginning with the verb, Fox (1985, 110) and Gordis (1974, 82) argue that in this context, גַּלַּל means 'to disturb'. Gordis admits that the verb most

naturally means 'to arouse', or 'stir up' love, yet the context convinces him of the need to modify this translation. Fox however discounts the translation 'do not arouse love' on the grounds that the verb is never used of sexual arousal elsewhere. He does admit that it is often used of arousal from sleep.

Fox and Gordis are both guided by their interpretation of לֹא תִפְּסֹחַ . According to Fox, it refers to the love-making of the couple which is not to be interrupted by the daughters of Jerusalem. Gordis suggests the following translation;

'... that you do not disturb our love
until it is satiated.'

As Robert (1963, 108) pointed out when the same suggestion was made by Budde (1910), לֹא תִפְּסֹחַ never has this meaning. Rather it expresses the power to energise (Cant 4:16; Deut 32:11; Isa 64:6; Zech 4:1) or to wake from sleep. The verb parallels לִשְׁכֹּחַ in Zech 4:1 and Job 3:8.

On the basis of the association of the verb with sleep, Robert assumes that the direct object, the beloved, is asleep. He does so in spite of the fact that there is no reference to sleep in the context. This interpretation is particularly important to Robert for it accords well with an allegorical reading of the Song. He identifies the sleeping beloved with Israel, who is summoned by God to awake (Isa 51:17; 52:1).

Pope (1977, 386-387) and Murphy (1990, 133) avoid any unnecessary association with sleep. Pope translates the phrase in the following manner;

‘... that you neither make nor excite love
until it please’.

Murphy translates it in a similar way;

‘... Do not arouse, do not stir up love
until it be ready’.

These are the least fanciful and the most accurate translations of the adjuration. Each understands the direct object $\text{לְאַהֲבָה} - \text{אֶת}$ to be love itself, the definite article referring to the mutual love evident in the verses which precede (2:6; 3:1-4; 8:3). Robert argues that the abstract noun לְאַהֲבָה refers to a person and that the verb at the end of the adjuration (יִפְתָּן) requires a subject capable of will. As Pope points out however, love is extremely wilful, as all lovers know.

The full form of the adjurations uses the formula אֶתְּ ... אֶתְּ on the first two occasions on which it is used (2:7; 3:5). A change however is made in 8:4 where the rhetorical question implied by the construction $\text{הֲיִנִּי ... הֲיִנִּי}$ strongly presses for a negative answer (GKC 137b n1);

‘I charge you, daughters of Jerusalem,
by the gazelles and hinds of the fields,
Would you arouse or stir up love
before it is ready?’

By now the daughters of Jerusalem have learnt their lesson, that love is an extremely powerful force and is not to be aroused aforetime. Indeed the poet reinforces his warning with a reflection (8:6-7) upon the power of love to overcome death itself. If the daughters of Jerusalem are a kind of choir who call the Song forth, they are also the chief target of its message, for this meditation upon love, its joys and sorrows, is didactic in so far as it issues a severe warning. Like the little sister (8:8-9), the daughters of Jerusalem are perhaps those who will next experience its transforming power. So wonderful and so terrible an experience is it, that they should not be tempted to court love aforetime.

St Paul's reference to the 'fragrance' of Christ pervading the universe (2 Cor 2:14) discloses the profound belief in the power of fragrance to convey the innermost essence of a person, to convey that which is intangible and invisible yet particular and unmistakable. It is the capacity of fragrance to reveal the peculiar quality of people of which Proust (1954, 63) speaks:

"C'étaient de ces chambres de province qui - de meme qu'en certains pays des parties entieres de l'air ou de la mer sont illuminées où parfumées par des myriades de protozoaires que nous ne voyons pas - nous enchantent des mille odeurs que degagent les vertus, la sagesse, les habitudes, toute une vie secrete, invisible, surabondante et morale que l'atmosphère y tient en suspens ..."

The ancient linguistic association of fragrance, breath and life in the OT, is perhaps the reason why fragrance was chosen in ancient Israel as the medium by means of which to designate kings and to praise God. Kings were anointed (𐤇𐤍𐤏, 1 Sam 10:1; 2 Sam 2:4, 5:3; 1 Kgs 1:39) as a sign of the spirit of God that had come upon them (1 Sam 16:13) and holy oil, consisting of myrrh, cinnamon, aromatic cane and cassia was spread over the ark, the tent of meeting, the altar, the lampstand and all the sacred vessels to mark them out as consecrated to God (Exod 30:23-25). Because of the association of fragrance with life, oils embalmed the bodies of the dead (Luke 23:56) and the burning of incense was believed to chase away unwanted demons (Tob 8:2-3).

Fragrance was also used in the secular world to honour guests whose head or feet (Ps 23:5; Luke 7:46) were anointed by their host. It was used by women to charm or delight their menfolk (Esth 2:12). At Ugarit, it was used by Anat's attendants to prepare her for battle (KTU 1.3 ii 1,3). In each case, sacred or secular, fragrance is a metaphor for life whose dimensions surpass the merely material, visible world.

In the Song, oils and spices play an important role. Two passages bear comparison because of the similarity of images, namely 1:2b-3a and 4:10b-d. Both passages describe the intimacy of the lovers. In each case, the motif of wine is a symbol of their erotic experience, focused in the exchange of kisses. The reference to the fragrance of each others' oils indicates the proximity of their bodies. The noun 𐤀𐤓𐤕𐤕 alerts us to the fact that it is not love in the abstract with which we are concerned here but rather acts of love, evoked discretely by images of taste and smell (Fox 1985, 97). Whilst the drinking of each other's wine suggests the communion of their bodies, the scent of each other's fragrance expresses the communion of their selves, an exchange which takes place even in the absence of the loved one. The fragrance of his anointing oils which she enjoys in the intimacy of his company (4:10) is the very same fragrance evoked by the mere mention of his name (1:3).

The image of 1:3 deserves special attention. The very mention of his name is balm to her (1:3b), conveying his presence to her and lifting her spirits. So powerful is this fragrance that not only she but her companions are captivated by it (1:3c). Their response to the scent of his oils is to love him (1:3c). Her

response is yet more decisive; she longs to be drawn into his presence (1:4a). The reciprocal movement conveyed by the image of 1.3 is of very great eloquence. It speaks of the way in which the lovers are irresistibly drawn to each other by love.

When it is the liquid consistency of the oils rather than their scent that is emphasised, the language is powerfully evocative of desire. As the beloved reaches for the door in order to open to her lover, her hands 'drip with myrrh' and her fingers run 'with liquid myrrh' (5:5). Similarly, when she describes her lover's lips, she sees them as water-lilies which 'drip liquid myrrh' (5:13). The water-lilies, with which his lips are compared, are associated with erotic experience in 6:2. This is brought about under the cover of a pastoral scene which simply transposes the language of eating and drinking to its pastoral correlate, the language of feeding or grazing.

From a purely pragmatic point of view, one does not let myrrh, imported at great cost from Arabia and India, simply drip (𐤓𐤏𐤍). Myrrh was a highly valued commodity. It was a component of holy oil (Exod 30:23-25), was used in rites of purification (Esth 2:12), as an anaesthetic (Mark 15:23) and to embalm the bodies of the dead (John 19:39). It was offered as a valuable gift (Matt 2:11), was used as a domestic perfume (Prov 7:17) and scented the robes of the king (Ps 45:8). The image of dripping myrrh is therefore one of gratuitous abundance. It describes a precious love which can no longer be contained.

The imagery of oils and spices stands on the threshold of two worlds, the courtly milieu and the realm of nature. As the section 1:12-14 discloses, there is

a teasing interplay between these two. This fluidity is part of a larger network of teasing transformations which undermine the boundaries between vehicle and tenor, inside and outside, the human body and the natural setting. The section begins with a straightforward description of the king who is lying on his couch (1:12). The image is a regal one, the setting, an interior. As he reclines in kingly splendour, a fragrance, that of the nard with which she has anointed herself, pervades the atmosphere (1:12). A certain distance is maintained between the lovers, for she is present only implicitly, through the scent of her nard, whose costliness befits a king.

In the following verse however (1:13), she moves progressively to the centre of the stage and it is she who lies down, cradling her lover between her breasts. He is represented metaphorically as a sachet of myrrh, an image called forth by the nard with which she anointed herself. The minimal reference to an external setting has also ceded in favour of a metaphorical one. Instead of the couch, her breasts become his resting-place for the night.

A third image offers an alternative to the sachet of myrrh (1:13a). He is to her "a spray of henna blossoms" (1:14a). The image is apt for not only is henna blossom fragrant but sprigs of henna were commonly worn in the hair and bosoms of young girls in the Middle East up until the 19th century (Moldenke 1952, 125).

With this image a transformation takes place. Oils and spices, the costly products proper to the court are integrated into their natural setting, for the

couch of the king fades before the vineyards of Ein-Gedi (1:14b). The exact intention of the geographical reference is ambiguous. It may simply serve to specify the source of the henna blossom and evoke by mention of Ein-Gedi, the luxuriance of an oasis which was known for its aromatic plants and trees. It may alternatively aim to explicitly indicate a shift in setting, from the court to the country, which has already taken place.

Our unpreparedness for these transformations and our inability to clearly discern metaphor from referent again and again takes us by surprise. The breaking of linguistic boundaries and the all but complete disintegration of distinctions mirrors at a linguistic level the fusion of the lovers who nevertheless remain themselves. Such a journey is characterised by delight and surprise, the very same sensations the reader experiences in the singing of the Song.

At the midpoint of the Song is "a garden locked, a fountain sealed" (4:12b). It is the beloved who is here represented as a garden. She is this intimate, enclosed, private space, accessible to her lover alone. She it is who gathers within her all that is representative of the luxuriance and fertility of the natural world. All the splendour and beauty of the natural world is for a moment concentrated in her. Every spice which is ever mentioned in the Song, henna, nard, myrrh and frankincense is present in this garden. Indeed within its walls grow many more exotic aromatic plants and trees - cinnamon, sweet cane, saffron and aloes. Piled up one upon the other without further explanation, they create the impression of heady luxuriance.

The motif of the garden tells with infinite discretion the story of love's consummation, yet it is also strangely continuous with the perpetual springtime of the garden of the world which everywhere declares the wonder of this singular love (2:11-13; 6:11; 7:11-12). At the end of the poem this continuity is made explicit in so far as the garden which represents the beloved suddenly becomes the real garden to which she invites her lover to come (5:1). There he may gather what is reserved specifically for him, his 'myrrh' and his 'spices' (5:1).

The effect of this two-tiered metaphorical system is to affirm that not only is the beauty of creation present in her in a unique way, at least in the eyes of her lover, but that her presence pervades the world. Thus it is that even when he absents himself from her to flee to the "mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense" (4:6) or to the unnamed "mountains of spices" (8:14) we know that she is also there. The density of scents and spices in the aromatic garden alludes to an intimacy which cannot be enjoyed when absent from one another. Their separation however cannot prevent the perpetuity of a certain communion. It lingers as a perfume which is diffused everywhere. It is on this note that the Song ends (8:14).

A final note on the beds of spices of 5:13 and 6:2. In the former, the reference is a straightforward metaphor used to describe his cheeks. It becomes intelligible in the second colon when these beds of spices are said to be fragrant. The language of fragrance is again evocative of the intimacy of the lovers.

In 6:2 on the other hand, these beds of spices become part of the universe the lovers inhabit. Already the mention of the garden (6:2a) is enough to alert us to a possible erotic overtone contained in the reference, for the motif of the garden is powerfully used in this manner. Our intuitions are confirmed by the juxtaposition of a declaration of their love for one another (6:3a) with a pastoral image (6:3b) which is reminiscent of those other references to eating and drinking. They are evidently erotic (1:2; 2:3; 4:5,10; 5:1; 7:9; 8:2). Are the beds of spices actual beds of spices or are they metaphors for something rather different? Again it is the lovers' prerogative to play tricks on us.

Any reference to clothing is related to the beloved only. She is adorned with jewels by her lover as a sign of his affection for her (1:10-11).

Articles of clothing, and in particular veils, also serve to elaborate another theme however, namely that of her inwardness, her hiddenness, her reluctance to be drawn out of doors.

Landy (1983, 68, 72) draws attention to this essential difference between the lovers. She is characterised by interiority and by stability whilst he is restless, caught in a perpetual movement which precipitates him from the "mountains of spice" (8:14) to his beloved's side. Again and again he comes to his coy beloved, coaxing her to leave with him. He comes to her window (2:9), addresses her as a dove hidden in the clefts of the rock (2:14) and knocks on the door, even tries the latch (5:4).

She, on the other hand, conceives of their love differently. Rather than escape out of doors, she more often dreams of drawing him to a yet more intimate enclosed space, the house of her mother, indeed the chamber of her own conception (3:4, 8:2).

It is to this basic difference between the lovers that the reference to her wearing a veil relates. She remains for him mysteriously hidden, wondrously inaccessible, inviting him to discover someone who is at once familiar and

strangely unknown. It is no coincidence that the first reference to her veil is associated with her eyes. It is their perfect clarity which her veil, for a moment, masks (4:1).

The image, as it is presented in 4:1, is extremely terse yet it is laden with allusion. It refers not only to the coy reserve of the doves of 2:14ab but also to his desire to hear her voice and to see her face (2:14cd).

The same word (תַּנְּמָל) is used on two other occasions (4:3, 6:7). On each occasion the veil masks the beloved's cheeks which are rosy as a pomegranate. The meshwork of the veil is described in terms of the composition of this fruit whose seeds are encased in tiny cells of rosy flesh.

The image falls in sequences which strongly parallel each other (4:1-3; 6:5-7). Indeed they are identical, except for a greater precision regarding the sheep which are shorn in 4:2, and in the addition of a description of her lips in 4:3a. The first sequence is part of a *wasf* which proceeds from her eyes 4:1b to her breasts 4:5. The second is briefer, dependant on the imagery of the first.

The additions to the first sequence are carefully chosen, for the images used to describe her lips (4:3a) and her cheeks (4:3b) are both drawn from the realm of haberdashery. In this way one image makes way for another; the scarlet thread which marks the meeting of her lips (4:3a) prepares for the veil which covers her cheeks (4:3b). The images are also related by colour; the scarlet thread finds a ready correspondent in her rosy cheeks.

The word used in each case is סָמָם . It is an unusual word which appears in the Hebrew Bible on one other occasion only, namely Isa 47:2. It has been related to the Aramaic root *ṣamṣem*, 'to veil' (Pope 1977, 457).

The image of the veil may belong specifically to wedding imagery, as does the term of address, כַּלָּה , "bride" (4:9, 11, 12; 5:1). Although the Song does not give us to understand that it is concerned with marriage as such, it is possible that elements are drawn from the marriage ceremony in order to celebrate love.

It is clear from the Hebrew Bible that although veils were not normally worn by women in public, young women did temporarily veil themselves when betrothed (De Vaux 1935, 408). Rebekah, for example, who did not previously wear a veil (Gen 24:16) covers herself as soon as she sees Isaac to whom she is promised (Gen 24:65). This custom explains why it was possible for Laban to substitute Leah for Rachel at Jacob's expense (Gen 29:23-25).

Alternately, the image may derive from life in a particularly sophisticated milieu. The prophet Isaiah (Isa 3:18-23) bears witness to the fact that in this environment, many kinds of headdress were worn. These include the כִּתְרוֹן of 5:7, a light summer mantle.⁴³ Eighth century Assyrian sculptures from Sennacherib's palace in Nineveh also testify to the fact (Keel 1986, 178). On them, the women of Judah are depicted wearing a kind of veil which covers their hair and falls down over the shoulders to the ground.

⁴³ The word used by LXX is *theristron*.

Veils however were never prescribed as female dress in Judaism. Normally Hebrew women appeared in public unveiled. Only thus could Abraham's servant see that Rebekah was "very fair to look upon" (Gen 24:16), only thus was Rebekah's beauty a matter of concern for Isaac when they lived among the people of Gerar (Gen 26:7), only thus was Abraham concerned for Sara when they travelled among the Egyptians (Gen 12:10-16). Moreover there is no specific word in the Talmud for a veil and the Mishnah (m. Sabb. 6.6) recommends the practice *only* to those women living in an Arab environment, where veils were normally worn (De Vaux 1935, 397-412). It is to this practice to which Tertullian refers when he recommends that Christian virgins should veil themselves for the sake of modesty (De Virginibus Velandis).

It appears then that contrary to the practice of her neighbours, Hebrew women wore veils only in specific circumstances, on the occasion of a young woman's marriage and for ornamental purposes, in sophisticated and cosmopolitan milieux.

There is however one other circumstance, that of prostitution, in which the veil was worn. Gen 38 tells the story of Tamar who, in order to appear to be a harlot, not only sat by the roadside but also covered herself in a veil. Indeed it is the donning of the veil which, in Judah's mind, identifies her as a harlot (Gen 38:15).

The word used to describe Tamar's veil is קָפָה , from the verb קָפָה , 'to fold', 'to double'. This would suggest that the veil consisted of two parts, leaving

room for the eyes. It is this word which describes Rachel's veil (Gen 24:65). The verbs used to describe her action are כָּסָה, 'to cover', and גָּלַה, also 'to cover'.

None of this vocabulary appears in the Song. In 1:7-8 however, the pastoral setting and the urgency of the woman's search for her lover are enough to suggest that the participle גָּלְתָהּ, literally, "as one wrapped" might allude to harlotry. Must she also go to such lengths to receive his attention? Must she, like Tamar, also deceive him to remind him of his duty towards her?

A number of other solutions have been proposed, each of which dulls this extremely powerful metaphor. G. Driver (1974, 159-160) for example, proposes that there is a second root גָּלַה, used in Jer 43:12, of a shepherd delousing a garment.

Interpreted accordingly, the image would convey her boredom in his absence and her total lack of interest in those around her. The infrequency of the meaning of this root however works against this interpretation.

An alternative is to follow the Peshitta, the Vg and Symmachus. Each of these recognises in the form גָּלְתָהּ, the metathesis of the first two consonants. The verb, they argue, is not גָּלַה, to 'wrap up', but גָּלַה, 'to wander'. To translate, "as one who wanders" is perfectly acceptable in the context except that it conveys nothing of her desperation. Only a straightforward translation of the MT can do this. It does so by means of allusion to a practice known to us only by virtue of the Tamar story of Gen 38.

E. Haulotte (1966, 11-13) has drawn our attention to the deeper significance of dress in the Hebrew Bible and to the symbolic dimensions of certain actions such as the putting on or taking off of clothes. On two occasions in the Song (5:3, 7), clothing is a medium of symbolic action. Both of these occurrences fall in the second narrative sequence (5:2-8).

The sequence opens with a paradoxical statement which discloses her constant attentiveness to her lover; "I slept, but my heart was awake" (5:2a). Hence it is both surprise and relief which her exclamation evokes;

"Listen! My beloved is knocking!" (5:2b)

He then calls to her directly, asking her to let him in (5:2c-f).

A moment's hesitation on her part (5:3) is enough to provoke the failure of their meeting, for the time it takes her to consider her present state of undress and what she would have to do to receive him, is the time it takes him to put his hand into the key-hole and to withdraw it (5:4a).

The consequences of her hesitation are deeply ironic, for she, who is thrown into disarray at the thought of being already undressed when her lover comes to her door (5:3), is thereafter forced to leave her home in the middle of the night to be forcibly stripped of her mantle (5:7). The mild inconvenience of having to get dressed again to open the door and to find shoes for her freshly bathed feet (5:3), is nothing compared to the violence she subsequently suffers at

the hands of the nightwatchmen (5:7). The removal of clothing is at the heart of the tragedy, both its cause and the nature of its effect.

In each case the removal of clothing itself is very different. In 5:3 it is she herself who undresses. She takes off her tunic (הַכַּתָּן), that is, a kind of petticoat (Haulotte 1964, 27-28). She is thereby rendered very vulnerable, as vulnerable as Tamar who was banished from the house of Amnon and sent outside wearing only her petticoat (2 Sam 13:18). Presumably the beloved in the Song had put on a nightdress. Of this garment however there is no mention. We are told only of her uncovering. Vulnerability however may accompany anticipation or even desire, for the bathing of her feet lends suggestive overtones to the theme of uncovering. It does so due to the well known euphemistic connotations of feet in the ancient world (Judg 3:24; 2 Kgs 18:27 qere; Isa 6:2).

In 5:7 on the other hand, the removal of clothing is a consequence of violence and deliberate injury. In this matter she has no choice. She is simply the passive victim of their assault. The clothing removed is outer clothing. According to the LXX, it is a light summer mantle. Her violation is reminiscent of those prophetic passages in which Yahweh punishes his people and their neighbours by "stripping" them of their luxurious apparel (Isa 20:4; 47:1-3; Jer 13:22).

The first mention of jewellery directs the reader to Egypt, for in 1:9-11 the beloved is compared to a mare belonging to the stud of Pharaoh. The image recalls those texts which speak of horses and chariots bought from Egypt during the ostentatious reign of Solomon (1 Kgs 10:26,29; 2 Chron 1:17):

To a mare of Pharaoh's chariotry,
I compare you, my love.

This simile, introduced so boldly in 1:9, is elaborated by a synonymic pair in 1:10. It is followed by a climactic statement in 1:11 which rounds off the scene. The difficulty however is that the intention of the poet seems to change in the course of these verses as he increasingly describes the beloved directly without the mediation of the simile of the mare. Without any reference to the simile of 1:9, in 1:10 he simply describes the earrings and collar which adorn her:

Your cheeks, lovely between earrings,
Your neck through beaded collar

The influence of the initial comparison survives only metaphorically, in the allusion to the horse's harness which these jewels suggest. Alter (1985, 197) first pointed out this optical illusion; mare and beloved shadow each other, tenor and vehicle have become one.

The exact nature of the image is also difficult to determine because of the obscurity of the word **נִרְאָה** which most commentators connect with the verb

לָּךְ, 'to go round' (Pope 1977, 343). On the basis of this etymology, the noun has sometimes been understood to refer to plaits of hair.

Alternatively the noun may refer to earrings, to the bands of a headdress or to locks of a wig (Keel 1986, 64). My preference is for the large gold loop earrings worn by the women of the 18th dynasty as described by Wilkinson (1971, 121-122). Circularity is implied by the etymology of the term.

Egyptian jewellery may also shed light on another term לָּךְ (1:10b), a technical term not found elsewhere in the OT but that is used of stringing pearls or fish. Pope (1977, 344) argues that in Arabic the verb is used of stitching, while the noun denotes a piece of jewellery composed of beads which is worn around the neck. In Egypt, beaded collars were frequently worn both by men and women. Two types of such collars are described by Wilkinson (1971, 108), the *usekh* and the *shebin*. Keel (1986, 64) on the other hand draws attention to the necklaces composed of several rows of pearls which were frequently found in Syria. He cites the example of an ivory found in Nimrod in north Syria, dating from the 9th or 8th century BC. It depicts a woman wearing a necklace composed of a number strings of beads worn tightly around the neck.

In my translation I have abandoned the post-biblical Hebrew association with pearls in order to evoke a more traditional style of necklace, the collar. I did so on account of the fact that it is not so much the materials used that the image highlights as the composition of the necklace. The Hebrew is extremely terse. The hapax לָּךְ simply indicates something that is formed by

perforation and strung together, ie. beads. The term 'collar' gives the image an Egyptian flavour appropriate to the reference to Pharaoh in 1:9.

1:11 compounds and develops the imagery of the preceding verse, indicating by means of the merismetic pair, 'gold and silver', the costliness of the earrings and consequently the esteem in which the wearer is held. The imagery is reminiscent of Ps 45 in which the queen on her wedding day 'stands in gold of Ophir' (Ps 45:9). The introduction of the first person plural form 'we' indicates something of the beloved's influence. It is a climatic device, parallel to that used by the beloved when, in 1:4, she invokes the support of her companions in praise of her loved one.

Noteworthy also is the choice of adjective used to describe the beloved's beauty in 1:10a. Her cheeks are described as הַיָּדָה , an adjective which echoes her self-proclaimed splendour in 1:5a. The use of the adjective הַיָּדָה in 1:5 and 1:10 discloses the unpromising outsider to be in fact a treasured beauty.

Ornamental imagery comes to the fore in 3:9-10c. One of the key words אֶפְרֹיִן (3:9) is a hapax though the general consensus is that it is a loan-word related to the Greek word *phoreion*, 'a sedan chair'. Moreover it parallels the semitic word הַטַּב , 'a couch' or 'bed' which, as in 1 Sam 19:15, seems to be portable.

In 3:9, the focus changes from the escort which accompanies Solomon's litter (3:7bc-8) to a description of the royal palanquin itself. Since the exact

nature of the אֶפְרָיִם is unknown, so too is the exact nature of its component parts and the ornamentation which embellishes it. It is however obvious that the description is hyperbolic. Only the best materials are used in a litter which honours the king. Comparable is the description of the gifts given to Asherah (KTU 1.4, 129-40).

The first material to be mentioned is wood from Lebanon (3:9). The reference is probably to the cedar wood for which Lebanon was so well known. These are the trees which on account of their strength (Ps 29:5), height (2 Kgs 19:23) and majesty (1 Kgs 4:33; 2 Kgs 14:9; Zech 11:1) display the magnificence of Yahweh's kingship. It is entirely fitting that they should be used to build the framework of the litter belonging to the king.

Next comes a description of its 'pillars' (3:10) which, depending on the nature of the vehicle described, could either be the supports of the canopy or the legs on which the entire frame rests, if it has legs. These are either solid silver or have silver inlay.

Parallel to the description of these pillars is the description of its אֶפְרָיִם (3:10b), variably translated as 'bolster' (Pope), 'carpets' (Fox), 'floor' (Falk) and 'roof' (Murphy). This noun, also a hapax, comes from the verb אָפַר, 'to spread' and has been translated by 'roof' in my version. The reason for this is stylistic; together the pillars and the roof constitute the framework. That is surely why they appear as a pair in 3:10ab. Only in 3:10c does the description pass to the

inside of the litter, first to the seat (3:10c) and then to the decoration of the interior as a whole (3:10d).

As the posts are of silver, so the roof is of gold. If the reference is to gold-inlay, nevertheless the impression is that of solid gold. As in our own language 'silver and gold' are a common pair (Deut 7:25; 8:13; 17:17; 1 Kgs 15:15; 2 Kgs 7:8; Isa 2:7; Ezek 38:13; Ps 105:37; 115:4; 135:15), for they constitute the entire range of precious metals accessible to the ancient world. Most often, they characterise regal or cultic splendour. It is the former to which the pair refers in the Song.

The parallelism continues in 3:10cd with reference first to the seat, and then the interior. The seat is made of purple (3:10c), a reference to the cloth rather than simply to the colour. In the ancient world, this very expensive fabric was associated with dignity and honour. It furnished the tabernacle (Exod 25:4) and was worn by royalty and those of high rank (Mark 15:17; Luke 16:19; John 19:2). It is therefore fitting that it should bedeck the litter of the king. The climax of the description however is in the interior, which is inlaid not with silver, gold nor precious fabric, but 'with love' which is the most splendid and honourable of all (cf. 8:7). Emendations have been proposed so as to harmonise 3:10d with the preceding description. לִבְיָהֹֿבֶֿהֶֿ 'love', has been emended to לִבְיָהֹֿבֶֿהֶֿ 'ebony' by Graetz (1871) and to לִבְיָהֹֿבֶֿהֶֿ 'stones' by Gerleman (1965). Driver (1936) has even suggested that the noun refers to 'leather' on the basis of Arabic cognate *ihāb*. These emendations however disguise a very significant change in register brought about by the adverbial accusative לִבְיָהֹֿבֶֿהֶֿ 'with love'. It moreover

is entirely appropriate if Solomon's litter has been sent by the king to fetch his new bride. Not only does its splendour honour him, the owner, but the love with which it was made, honours her.

In 4:9, the language of ornamental beauty momentarily breaks into a sequence dominated by natural imagery. The verse develops by means of repetition. The verb יִצְּתֹךָ is repeated in 4:9a-b and the adjective נֶחֱלָא in 4:9c-d. The colons, in Schökel's terms, "branch out" (1988, 73-74), the one developing upon the other.

Two *wasfs* (5:10-16; 7:2-7) draw on ornamental imagery. Though it is most often he who describes her in these descriptive songs, in 5:10-16 the trend is reversed.

5:10-16 begins with a general statement about her lover's complexion (5:10). It is significant that apart from details concerning his face (5:11-12), at which point natural imagery dominates, the lover is described in terms of the costly materials of artistic enterprise - alabaster, gold, ivory and precious stones.

There has been much debate as to how to interpret this imagery. Proponents of the cultic theory have argued that the imagery refers to a statuette used in the Sacred Marriage rite (Wittekindt), others have suggested that a statue is used as a metaphor of the beloved's beauty (Gerleman). Yet others have sought to interpret particular references as allusions to pieces of clothing or jewellery worn by the lover (Joüon).

It has been noted that the *wasf* or descriptive song which became so popular in later Arabic love poetry originates in hymns to the gods and in descriptions of their statuary. A Sumerian hymn cited in ANET (1969a, 638) describes one such statue. The description (ll. 11-24) proceeds from head to foot as in the Song. Hermann (1968) notes the relationship of the oldest of these descriptions to the Sacred Marriage rite.

It is clear from Egyptian love poetry however, that this imagery became the currency of poets by means of which to speak of the overwhelming splendour of the loved one. It is to this end that the imagery is used in the Song. If there are hints of artistic models, the poet has cut himself free from their cultic context. As stated many times before, the Song is not about fertility but about love.

Gerleman (1965, 68-69) is of the opinion that in the light of Egyptian polychrome statuary, the *wasf* of 5:10-16 begins to make sense. The imagery of 5:10-16 however is much more wide ranging than he suggests. It certainly does not cohere in one model only, for sculptural images combine with architectural imagery to convey both the beauty and the grandeur of the loved one. At times he has the formality of an exceptionally valuable bust (5:10-11). At others, he exhibits the grandeur and solidity of a civic monument (5:15).

The adjective $\Pi\Upsilon$ (5:10) has caused some difficulty, for in Lam 4:7 the verbal form $\imath\Pi\Upsilon$ refers to the colour, white. Here however, the adjective is used as an evocation of that other component of colour which is brightness. As Fox (1983, 147) points out, ideas of whiteness and brightness are closely related; both

are implied in the Egyptian adjective *ḥd*. Indeed both aspects appear in an Egyptian love song, precisely with regard to complexion:

‘Behold her, like Sothis rising
at the beginning of a good year:
shining, precious, white of skin,
lovely of eyes when grazing.’⁴⁴

Not only is her lover radiant, but he is also ruddy. Indeed Keel (1986, 186) believes that the two adjectives form a hendiadys. He suggests that they be translated ‘glänzend rot’, that is ‘bright red’. 1 Sam 16:12 and 17:42 both associate a ruddy complexion with masculine beauty. Israel’s first kings, Saul and David, were both characterised thus. Indeed the relationship between redness and the ideal of masculine beauty may go much further back. Keel (1986, 186) remarks that the word for man is *ḥṭ*, ‘the red one’. He also points out that in Egyptian art, men were usually painted a red-brown colour. The ideal of feminine beauty was different, as is indicated by the Egyptian love song cited above.⁴⁵

Gerleman (1965, 69) suggests that the combination *ḥṭ* *ḥṭ* makes one think of Egyptian polychromy and in particular of those bronze figures whose

⁴⁴ Fox (1985, 52 ll. 1-6)

⁴⁵ Pope (1977, 531) cites KTU 1.19, iv 42-43 in which Pugat bathes and reddens herself before going to the camp of her brother’s murderer to avenge his death. Pope seems to suggest that the practice is cosmetic. On the contrary however, is the reddening of her face not concomitant with the donning of warrior’s clothes? Is she not thereby making herself out to be a male warrior? Before Anat goes into battle, she too reddens herself with murex dye (KTU 1.101 II 3).

naked parts were not painted all over but were sometimes inlaid with gold, silver, copper or electrum. The statuesque quality of the lover is enhanced by the hendiadys of the following verse wherein his head is described as זָהָב טָהוֹר, 'gold, finest gold'. This description is reminiscent of the image which Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream (Dan 2:32). It too had a head of gold. It also reminds Gerleman (1965, 173) of Homer's *Odyssey*, of the description of Athene pouring charm over Odysseus' head as a goldsmith pours out silver and gold (*Odyssey* 6.232-234). The aim and object of the colourful, sculptural imagery of 5:10-11a is to emphasise the virility and surpassing value of the lover. This is made explicit in 5:10b, where he is described as 'outstanding among ten thousand'.

If 5:11a describes the young man's head in general, 5:11b enters into greater detail with the description of his hair. The noun תַּלְתָּלִי is a hapax which Pope (1977, 536) relates to Akkadian *taltallû*, the pollen of the date panicle. He also points out that in Arabic *taltalat* is used of the envelope of the date palm and that in Arabic poetry the long black hair of the beloved is compared to date clusters or to vines. Most critics have translated the word by 'palm fronds' on the basis of this etymology. In the context of the sculptural imagery of 5:10-11a the image suggests the stylised representation of hair on a piece of statuary. The blackness of these locks (5:11b) adds colour to the portrait and the picture of a painted piece of sculpture comes to mind, reminding the reader of those Egyptian sculptures described by Gerleman (1965, 26) which, although made of wood or soft stone, were either completely, or partly painted.

The introduction of natural imagery in 5:11b does however humanise the static portrait and prepare for the extended metaphor of 5:12. More precisely, the image of the raven (5:11b) calls up the image of the dove, a motif already well known to readers as used by the lover to address his beloved. He who described her eyes in these terms (1:15; 4:1), is now addressed by his beloved in very similar terms. This is the device called 'mirroring' by Elliott (1989, 246).

With this eye contact the formality of the portrait is broken and movement is restored to the scene. Throughout the three colons which follow (5:12bcd), the simile undergoes elaborate development, taking on a life of its own. Two other natural images follow in 5:13.

The description of his cheeks draws attention to his highly scented beard (cf. Ps 133:2) and the description of his lips which 'drop liquid myrrh' betrays the beloved's longing to be reunited with her lover. With these images, movement and naturalism replace formality and distance, and the desire for intimacy with her lover temporarily gains the upper hand over the desire to describe his splendour. The official portrait reestablishes itself however as soon as she passes from the description of his eyes and lips to the rest of his body, to the description of his arms (5:14ab), his torso (5:14cd) and his legs (5:15). Henceforth her self-control reasserts itself in the measured advance of the *wasf*.

Many suggestions have been made in the attempt to identify the גלגל of 5:14. Derived from the verb גלגל, 'to roll', the form appears twice in 1 Kgs 6:34 of some part of the doors of the inner sanctuary. Pope (1977, 542) suggests

that the reference is to folding doors, Fox (1985, 148) suggests that they refer to the hinge bars. The only other occasion on which the form appears is in Esth 1:6 in connection with the hanging of curtains in the royal palace. There it has been translated either by 'rods' or 'rings'. The interpretation of 5:14 partly depends on the translation of $\square^{\prime}\gamma^{\prime}$, literally 'hands', but possibly 'arms' (Gen 24:30,47; Jer 38:12). Robert (1963) translates 'ses mains sont des globes d'or' whilst Pope (1977) and Murphy (1990) prefer 'rods of gold'. Common to both is the notion of circularity implied by the root $\gamma\gamma\gamma$, 'to roll'. Use of the form elsewhere in the OT suggests an architectural image; her lover's arms display the solidity and durability of rods of pure gold. This additional imaginative element disturbs the identification of the lover simply with a piece of statuary. As Robert (1963, 219) suggests, the reader is reminded of such passages as 1 Kgs 7:15-22 which describes the building of the temple.

The imagery of 5:14a is developed in 5:14b where it is affirmed that these rods of gold are set with precious stones, the identity of which is unknown. Most likely they came from Tarshish, the port which has given them its name. These gemstones also decorate the high priest's breast-plate (Exod 39:13).

Next in sequence is a description of his loins (cf. Dan 2:32). The word $\square^{\prime}\gamma\gamma$ usually refers to the internal organs of digestion and procreation but here they must refer to his stomach or more precisely his loins. The imagery which describes this lower region is equally difficult. The noun $\gamma\gamma\gamma$ is a hapax, perhaps related to $\gamma\gamma\gamma$, 'to be smooth' (cf. Jer 5:28) or possibly $\gamma\gamma\gamma$ the Aramaic equivalent of $\gamma\gamma\gamma$, 'to think of', used of fashioning works of art (Exod 28:27,28;

29:5). In rabbinical Hebrew it is used of a 'bar', a 'pillar' or block (b. Men 28a; Cant Rab 5:12). This sense is appropriate here for the reference is to the lover's lumber area which is likened to a block of ivory, encrusted with lapis lazuli. Murphy (1990, 72 n305) compares the imagery to that of a Sumerian love poem concerned with male virility:

'O my pure pillar, my pillar
Sweet are your charms
Pillar of alabaster set in lapis lazuli
Sweet are your charms'

Like 5:11a, 5:14cd is reminiscent of the descriptions of ancient statuary, for it makes a simple correlation between the part of the body and the material of which it is made. Keel (1986, 190) cites a 12th century hymn to the Egyptian sun god, Re:

'His bones are of silver, his flesh is of gold, what his head is, is of
real lapis lazuli'

Comparable is the Egyptian love song cited by Fox (1985, 52) which uses the language of these descriptions of the deity to convey the splendour of the loved one:

'Long of neck, white of breast,
her hair, true lapis lazuli.
Her arms surpass gold,
her fingers like lotuses ...'

Contrary to Gerleman (1965, 69) who interprets 5:15 in terms of statuary, insisting that the socket ׀׀ is that of a statue on which the legs rest like pillars, the primary reference of the imagery is not statuary but architecture. The vocabulary of 5:15 is specifically architectural and has links with the most significant of Israel's buildings; his legs, which are compared to alabaster columns (׀׀) recall the columns of the tabernacle (Exod 27:10,11,17; 36:38; Num 3:37), the pillars of Solomon's palace (1 Kgs 7:2,3,6) and the pillars before the temple (1 Kgs 7:15; Jer 52:20,21; 1 Ch 18:8; 2 Ch 3:15,17; Ezek 40:49). Moreover these pillars are founded upon bases of gold. The verb ׀׀ which is used here is the verb commonly used in the OT for laying the foundation of walls (Ps 137:7), of the world (Ps 24:2; 104:5; Prov 3:19) and especially of the temple (Ezr 3:12; Isa 44:28; 1 Kgs 5:31; Ezr 3:10). The sockets into which these alabaster pillars are set are themselves used of architecture rather than of statuary in the OT: ׀׀ describes the base of the tabernacle (Exod 26:19), the base of pillars (Exod 27:11; Num 3:36) and metaphorically the base of the earth (Job 38:6). 5:14 is not unique in its use of architectural imagery in the description of a loved one. In Sir 26:18 the virtuous woman is described in terms of the golden columns which stand in the holy place of the ancient tabernacle (Exod 25:31-40; 26:32):

‘Like the light which shines above the holy lamp stand are her beauty of face and graceful figure. Golden columns on silver bases are her shapely limbs and steady feet.’

Robert (1966, 233) remarks that the reference to white alabaster is an allusion to the temple as described in 1 Kgs 6-7. Pope (1977, 546) points out that Esth 1:6 mentions alabaster pillars in the palace of the queen. In Ludingira's

description of his mother (Cooper 1971, 160), she is described as 'an alabaster statuette, set on a lapis pedestal'. In the Song, the imagery is of the finest of Israel's architecture; it describes the grandeur and dazzling splendour of the loved one.

With the imagery of 5:15a, the language of art and artisanship which has dominated the *wasf* (with the exception of 5:12-13) gives way to imagery drawn from the natural world (5:15b). Indeed the cedars of Lebanon which describe his appearance are on the threshold of these two worlds: they clearly belong to the natural world, yet their wood is the raw material which elsewhere furbishes images of artistry in the Song (1:17; 2:9; 8:9).

At this point the *wasf* itself draws to a close, for complete now is the itemised description of his body from top to toe. Henceforth her considerations are more general. They are evocative of his desirability as a whole. In 5:15b she describes his overall appearance, and in 5:16 she speaks of the sweetness of his speech.

Just as the *wasf* of 5:10-16 is selective in terms of the images chosen and the parts of the body described, so too is the *wasf* of 7:2-5. In it there is a certain collusion between vehicle and referent so as to emphasise the fullness of her form, her voluptuousness, her fecundity. Thus it is that he chooses to describe her breasts (7:4) and rounded thighs (7:2), both of which are peculiarly characteristic of the female form.

Other parts of the body which of themselves are less evocative, he describes in terms of circularity - the bowl (7:3a), the heap of wheat (7:3c), the circle of lilies (7:3d), the pools in Heshbon (7:5).

As in 5:10-16 where everything points to the young man's virility, so in 7:1-5, everything points to her fullness or fecundity. Images are drawn from a multiplicity of sources in the process, from the realm of artisanship (7:2b-3a), nature (7:3d-4), architecture and topography (7:5-6). They also proceed in couplets, the one colon making more precise the other. As in 5:10-16, this procedure constitutes the dynamic of the Song.

Contrary to 5:10-16 however, the movement is from below to above. It begins with her feet (7:2) and closes with her hair (7:6).

Furthermore the relationship between the subject of contemplation and the speaker is different. While she momentarily is overcome by his eyes and lips which temporarily overwhelm her (5:12-13), he is consistently objective up until the final verse at which point he is overcome by the object of his gaze (7:5).

In the final chapter of the Song, ornamental imagery, the source of much enigma, persists.

The Song reaches its climax in the small section 8:6-8, at which point the beloved, for the first time, reflects upon the experience of love.

She introduces a general statement about the inexorable power of love (8:6c-d) with an urgent imperative (8:6a-b):

‘Set me as a seal upon your heart,
as a seal upon your arm’

By means of this image she expresses her intense desire never to be separated from him, to be bound to him in all his thoughts and actions.

The image appears elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. It is a symbol of the intimacy and the identity of purpose which pertains between Yahweh and his servant Zerubbabel (Hag 2:23; Sir 4:9). It is an image of the destruction of this unity of purpose with regard to the unwilling servant Coniah, son of Jehoiakim (Jer 22:24). In Gen 38:18,25 the seal or signet ring is the token of the integrity of its owner.

The image is also used in Egyptian love poetry cited by Fox (1985, 38).

‘If only I were her little seal ring,
the keeper of her finger,
I would see her love
each and every day’

The Egyptian influence behind the image of the seal in the Song is further substantiated by Pope (1977, 666) who suggests that both סֶטֶם and סֶטֶם are Egyptian loan-wards.

insignificance before the absolute power of love which is itself its own reward (8:8). Only lovers, says the Song, comprehend love's worth. Only fools, the Song insists, persist in bargaining for love and beauty. These silver cannot buy (8:12). The image of silver in the closing verses (8:11-12) presses home this triumphant conclusion.

This section belongs to the larger subject of topography which will be considered in due course. The present task is merely to draw attention to those images which speak of the lovers, and particularly the beloved, in terms of architectural details.

First of all there is the reversal of the beloved's social position. Initially she is set in opposition to the daughters of Jerusalem (1:5). Later she is beaten by the defenders of its gates, the watchmen of its walls (5:7). In 8:10 however, she sings her song of triumph using imagery based upon urban architecture. She, who was seen as a danger to those living within the city walls (5:7), is herself a wall (8:10). She, who no doubt was spied upon from its towers, boasts of breasts which resemble them (8:10). The city no longer threatens the beloved. Instead its walls and towers rise triumphant in love's praise. By 8:10 she is powerfully in command, as the assertive personal pronoun, ^{אני}, proclaims. At this very moment however, the defences of the city cease to be effective, and boundaries begin to crumble. As soon as the eyes of the lovers meet, the citadel surrenders and there is a miraculous "peace" (8:10d). The two meanings of the verbal form ^{נמצא}, "as one who finds" or "as one who brings" are equally apt, for the lovers are at peace in the reciprocity of each other's gaze.

More precise are the architectural details of the *wasf* of 7:2-7. They appear with particular concentration in 7:5. There, her neck is compared to an ivory tower (7:5a). Her eyes are compared to pools in Heshbon by a certain gate

of Bath-rabbim (7:5bc). Her nose is compared to a tower in Lebanon, overlooking Damascus (7:5de). As the *wasf* proceeds, the poet's vision becomes progressively broader as architectural details consistently cede to topographical ones: pools (7:5b) and gates (7:5c) yield to allusions to the city of Damascus (7:5e) and to Mt Carmel (7:6a). A second consequence of this progression is to identify the beloved both with particular locations in Palestinian towns and with the wider world of the Ancient Near East. Local, national and international boundaries become indistinct. She, who is powerfully present in particular places, by a certain pool or gate, also seems to pervade much of the known world.

The progression of 7:2-7 is a logical one. The *wasf* moves upward from feet (7:2a) to thighs (7:2c), from neck (7:5a) to eyes (7:5b) and finally to a description of her head (7:6). Height is an important dimension of the *wasf*.

The first indication of height is the comparison of her neck to an ivory tower (7:5a). It is also present in the description of her nose which is likened to a tower of Lebanon, overlooking Damascus (7:5de). The *wasf* reaches its term in the description of her head and then her hair (7:6). The image chosen to characterise the relationship between her head and the rest of her body (7:6a) is that of Mt Carmel which magnificently dominates the Mediterranean Sea and the Jezreel Valley.

The ascent which takes place in the course of the *wasf* is mirrored by an ever increasing emotional intensity which reaches its term when the king ironically yet inevitably falls for the singer of the song (7:6c). He, the king, is rendered

helpless at the sight of the locks which fall from her head. The word רלת, 'a lock of hair', has been carefully chosen to emphasise her position of superiority. The noun derives from the verb רלה, 'to fall'.



CHAPTER 3

IMAGERY OF FAMILY LIFE

Imagery drawn from family life falls into two main categories, namely images referring to motherhood and those concerning sibling relationships. This particular bias raises another question, namely the significance of the absence of a paternal figure in the Song?

The absence of any reference to a father-figure is related to the fact that the Song is not concerned with the institution of marriage and its economic, social consequences for particular families. There is no mention of the suitability of the partner, nor of the agreement upon a bride-price, both of which would have been prime considerations for any Israelite father.⁴⁶ Rather the Song is concerned with romantic love, the affairs of the heart. Hence it is the mother rather than the father who has pride of place.

⁴⁶ KTU 1.24 describes how the moon god Yarikhu acquired his bride Nikkalu. Explicit reference is made to the bride's father in connection with the bride-price (KTU 1.24 20-24).

The mothers of both the lover and the beloved are mentioned at various points throughout the Song, yet they never occupy anything but a secondary role as the bearers and supporters of their children. They themselves they are shadowy figures, whose characters are not even sketchily developed.

The beloved's mother is the first relative to be mentioned in the Song (1:6c). It is therefore with her that the survey should begin.

The beloved's mother does not herself enter into the dialogue at this point, but it is by reference to her that the beloved relates to her brothers in such a way as to distance them. By referring to them as 'my mother's sons' (1:6e), she suggests that it is only by virtue of their common mother that the siblings have anything to do with each other at all. The context of this phrase elsewhere in the OT confirms this intention, for on every occasion it is used to parallel the more direct term 'brothers' (Gen 27:29; 43:29; Ps 50:20; 69:8). At Ugarit too, the phrase 'my mother's sons' parallels the phrase 'my own brothers' (KTU 1.6 vi 10-11).

It is this conflict within the family which sows the seeds of her rejection by society at large. Because of her negative relationship with her brothers, she is obliged to justify herself before the daughters of Jerusalem (1:5). Home, as represented by her brothers, and society as represented by the daughters of

Jerusalem seem to constitute a united front against her. It is only her mother with whom there seems to be the possibility of more a positive relationship.

In 6:8 the beloved is again singled out *though* this time not for scorn but for praise. If she was shunned by the daughters of Jerusalem in 1:6, in 6:9 she receives the admiration of the queens, concubines and young women of the court. The vocabulary used of their reaction to the beloved closely resembles that used of the ideal wife in Prov 31:28.

‘Her children rise up and call her blessed
her husband also and he praises her’

If the beloved receives the praise of the women of the court (6:9), this admiration arises spontaneously out of the lover’s declaration of his beloved’s incomparability:

‘There may be sixty queens and eighty concubines
and innumerable young women,
but one alone is my dove, my perfect one ...’

She is neither queen nor concubine but simply the daughter of an anonymous, undistinguished mother. This relationship alone distinguishes her. Moreover, just as her lover prefers the beloved to all the women of the court, so her mother prefers her above all her children. In 6:9c she is described as:

‘... her mother’s only one,
the favourite of her who bore her’

Lover and mother are of the same opinion. His darling is her darling also. In moments of joy as in times of opposition, her mother is their closest ally.

Her mother's house (3:4; 8:2) is also the place of security *par excellence*. In contrast to the city streets, in which the lovers meet with hostility, disapprobation and even violence, her mother's house is a safe, private place, impervious to public censorship. Indeed unlike any other love place, it is free from the strictures which would make either of the lovers apprehensive. There is not, in this context, any mention of the need for her lover to flee (cf. 2:17; 4:6; 8:14).

This may be because in 3:4, as in 8:2, it is a place to which the lovers do not yet have access. The unexpected change in tense in 3:4 (אֶרְפֹּנֶה) suggests that the fulfilment of her desire may still belong to the future.

"I held him, now I will not let him go,
till I bring him to my mother's house,
to the chamber of her who conceived me."

The dramatic tension created by the shift in tense from complete (אֶחַזְתִּיךָ) to incomplete (אֶרְפֹּנֶה) is sustained by the preposition עַל which links 3:4d to 3:4e by means of *enjambement*. It is heightened by the adjuration addressed to the daughters of Jerusalem (3:5). It closes the scene without resolving the question of whether the reunion does in fact take place in the mother's house or not.

The importance of the mother's house as a place of refuge for the lovers is conveyed by the increasingly diminutive surroundings in which the lovers find themselves. The beloved's passage from the open streets (3:2) to her mother's

house (3:4d) and bedchamber (3:4e) creates the impression of a series of enclosures which progressively distance the lovers from the external world. In addition, the alliterative sequence \aleph, \beth, \aleph which characterises 3:4e, conveys an atmosphere which is increasingly dreamlike. 3:4e is also shorter than its counterpart 3:4d, thereby bringing the sequence quickly to a close.

The beloved's mother is alluded to in each element of the parallelism. Her home constitutes the beloved's home (3:4d)⁴⁷ and her bedroom recalls the beloved's own origins (3:4e). Indeed there is even the hint that the beloved's mother herself creates a third and final element in the sequence of increasingly enclosed spaces. She is referred to as, 'her who conceived me' (3:4e), calling to mind the beloved's first home, which is the womb.

In 8:1 a similar sequence presents itself. Burdened by the weight of public censorship, the beloved wishes her lover were her brother whom she could kiss freely in public and then take home. He is clearly not her brother however, for she longs to take him not to his, but to her mother's house. Nor is her love for him purely that of a sister, as the imagery of 8:2 strongly suggests.

Fox (1985, 118) suggests that the beloved's impatience may relate to a custom whereby the unmarried woman took her boyfriend to her maternal home as a first stage in making a romantic relationship public. The beloved of the Song is not able to take this step yet. As regards 8:1 he may well be right. The

⁴⁷ cf. Gen 24:28; Ruth 1:8

difficulty arises when he assumes a similar obstacle to the lovers' reunion in 3:4. To do so is to assume consistency of context throughout the Song. This is clearly impossible, for a logical reconstitution would lead us to the unlikely conclusion that the Song sings of premarital sex or of an affair.⁴⁸ Clearly the evocation of reunion and of intense longing, of danger and of secrets shared are to be internalised. Much more important than the external circumstances of the lovers is their perpetual longing for each other. This is what 8:1-2 seeks above all to convey. It does so by a variety of means. The verb קָוָה , 'to find' (8:1c), recalls the narratives of 3:2-4 and 5:6-8c, and the reference to finding her lover 'outside' (לְמִדְּבָר) is a reminder both of the urgency of her search and of the desolate character of the city streets by night.

There is also the technique called paronomasia by means of which her yearning to kiss her lover (לְשׁוֹנְךָ) is associated with drinking (לְשׁוֹנְךָ). The association is already familiar to the reader (cf. 1:2, 5:1, 7:10). The originality of 8:1-2 is in the harmony of sound between tenor and vehicle.

Assonance and alliteration also contribute to the evocation of the beloved's longing in this verse. C.F. Burney (1909, 584-587) points out the importance of rhyme in these verses. He draws attention to the final accented syllable וֹ in

⁴⁸ As already argued in the Introduction (1) elements of secrecy (2:17; 8:14) combined with the evocation of sexual union (5:1) are more characteristic of an illicit relationship than of marriage. The much debated *beena* marriage is excluded on the grounds that there is no reference to any gift brought to the beloved by her absent husband and by her inability to take him home (8:1-2). On the subject of marital arrangements alternative to the patrilocal norm, see Jaussen (1910, 237-49), Morgenstern (1929, 91-110; 1931, 46-58), Patai (1960, 44-49) and van Selms (1954, 63-82).

8:1ab, 2d and to the final unaccented syllable ׁ in 8:2b, 3b. He also draws attention to the sub-rhyme created by the second person masculine singular suffix ך at the end of 8:1c, 2a. Each of these open syllables is powerfully evocative of her yearning.

One further enigma remains concerning 8:1-2. It also concerns the beloved's mother. Scholars are divided as to how one should translate תלמרנ ׁ for it may be rendered 'you will teach me', (Delitzsch, Keel, Murphy) or 'she will teach me' (Falk KJ). Alternatively, Pope and Fox suggest that one should omit the ך in order to read תלרנ ׁ. The verse would consequently parallel 3:4 more closely. This last suggestion is the most satisfactory, especially since in 3:4 and in 8:5 there seems to be a connection in the beloved's mind between the events of love and the lover's origins; in 3:4 she looks forward to being alone with her lover in the very place of her own conception as if continuity of place seemed to matter. Similarly in 8:5, the beloved preludes her declaration of love's power (8:6-8) with the memory of pain and sorrow which accompany her lover's birth. The psychoanalyst might suggest that the motif discloses the impulse to be present at one's own conception. The poet uses it to suggest that love itself constitutes a kind of birth which is repeated in every generation.

The lover's mother, like the beloved's mother, plays a significant yet subordinate role. In 3:11 she crowns her son on his wedding day, a gesture which both speaks of the closeness of the relationship and allows for a change to take place therein (cf. Gen 2:24). She however is never more than briefly mentioned; her son, who is both king and bridegroom, is at the centre of the stage.

As Keel (1986, 128) and Murphy (1990, 152) both point out there is no evidence in the OT of a tradition whereby the queen mother crowned her son either at his wedding or at his coronation, even though it must be recognised from the stories concerning Bathsheba (1 Kgs 1:11-31; 2:13-25), Jezebel (2 Kgs 10:13) and Athaliah (2 Kgs 11) that the queen mother enjoyed considerable power, particularly in Judah. In addition, both Isa 61:10 and Ps 45:3-9 speak of a variety of ceremonial dress worn at weddings but neither mentions a crown or wedding garland. The scene is clearly a poetic flourish, a literary fiction in favour of the lover who is temporarily identified with King Solomon. The wedding festivities, in which his mother participates and to which the daughters of Jerusalem are summoned, all pay tribute to him.

It is not surprising that in 3:11cd, as in 3:4, it is the mother rather than the father that is associated with romantic love. The Egyptian love songs too display this preference;

‘Mother is good in commanding me thus;

"Avoid seeing <him>!"

Fox (1985,52)

So do the Sumerian love songs;

‘Inanna, at the command of her mother,

Bathed, anointed herself with goodly oil,

Covered her body with the noble *pala*-garment,

Took ..., her dowry,

Arranged the lapis lazuli about (her) neck,

Grasped (her) seal in her hand’

(ANET 1969:639)

The lover’s mother is mentioned for a second last time in 8:5;

‘Under the apricot tree I awoke you,
There your mother was in labour with you,
There she who bore you, laboured.’

One of the difficulties of this verse is the translation of the verbs הִכַּלְתָּהּ and הִכַּלָּה, for the root may mean either ‘conceive’ or ‘travail’. To opt for the former is to understand the beloved to mean that she awakens her lover in the very place where he was conceived. In that case we are reminded of 3:5 in which the beloved’s mother’s house is described as the ‘chamber of her who conceived me’. The context of the verse however suggests that the more common meaning ‘travail’ should be adopted, in view of the climactic statement concerning the power of love to conquer death which follows immediately afterwards (8:6). The willingness of a mother to suffer terrible pain in order that her child might live is a fine example of love’s triumph over death indeed.

The role of both mothers may now be summarised. As previously suggested, both mothers are present throughout the Song although neither is developed as a character in her own right. They remain anonymous, secondary figures, associated above all with the lovers’ conception (3:4) and birth (8:2,5) and with key moments in their emotional life. His mother participates in a literary fiction which celebrates his splendour and which marks the transition from adolescence to manhood (3:11) whilst her mother offers her home as a place of security for the lovers, a place of freedom where they may consummate their love (3:4, 8:2). Both mothers represent parental authority (1:6, 3:11) yet both are moved principally by the desires of their children’s hearts. As such they are akin

to the mothers throughout the Ancient Near East. In the love songs of Egypt and Sumer, as in Israel, they are associated primarily with the heart.

Landy (1983, 73) has drawn attention to the contribution of infancy to adult sexuality. Hence the imagery of suckling which he claims characterises much of the language of lovemaking. Whilst Landy is at pains to stretch the theory as far as possible, it does seem likely that images of suckling do underlie the language of eating and drinking which describes their lovemaking. In 8:2c for example, the beloved promises to give her lover spiced wine. She then offers him the juice of her pomegranates (8:2d). The first person personal pronominal suffix (וְנִתְּנָהּ) strongly suggests that the reference is metaphorical, that she in fact is offering him her breasts. There may also be an echo of suckling in the extended metaphors of 4:5 and 7:8-9. These images will be discussed in the sections Vines and Vineyards and Animals and Birds respectively.

Further images of suckling are afforded by the LXX which consistently translates שָׁדַי as 'breasts' rather than as 'lovemaking' (1:2; 4:10). In each case the breasts of the loved one are explicitly compared to the best wine, even though the subject of 1:2 is masculine rather than feminine. Gregory of Nyssa acknowledged this imagery to be maternal and interpreted it allegorically (Daniélou 1967, 24).⁴⁹

⁴⁹ The subject, he suggests, is divine wisdom. This wisdom surpasses human wisdom even although the latter is fine wine and the nourishment of grown men. True wisdom is received as milk from the breast of God by his children.

The form of address 'my sister, my bride' appears several times in one section only (4:9-5:1). This section corresponds to what I will argue in The Garden is the climax and midpoint of the Song. There, under the image of the garden, the beloved becomes a figure of paradise for her lover. She is both the place and means of his return.

The epithets 'my sister, my bride' are skilfully employed in 4:9-5:1. Initially (4:9a,10a,12a) the epithets are situated at the end of the first colon, thereby underlining and isolating what precedes. The element isolated by the epithets is invariably picked up in some way in the second colon although the relationship between the repeated elements becomes more complex as the sequence develops. In 4:9 it is the verbal form לַבַּתְנִי that is isolated by the epithet. In 4:10 it is the noun יָרֵיךְ. In 4:12 there is repetition and variation, גֵּן נָעוּרִי becomes גֵּל נָעוּרִי. The effect of the epithets on each occasion is to slow down the description, and to communicate the delicate process by means of which the garden opens to welcome her loved one. In 5:1, when her lover at last accepts the beloved's invitation to come and eat, the relationship of the epithet to the verse is quite different. There, every element is new so as to convey her lover's haste:

'I have come to my garden, my sister and bride,
I have gathered my myrrh and my spices,
I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey,
and drunk my wine with my milk.'

To address one's beloved as 'my sister' is not peculiar to the Song. It is evident in Sumerian Sacred Marriage songs⁵⁰ and even more frequently in the love songs of Egypt⁵¹. It is also used by Anat of her relationship with her intended, Aghat (KTU 1.18 24), and by Baal, of his wife Anat (KTU 1.3 iv 39). Van Selms (1954, 18-19) suggests that the epithets 'brother' and 'sister' may be founded upon concrete social relationships. Baal may indeed have been the brother of Anat, reflecting a social situation in which brothers and sisters could and did marry. In Hebrew society, marriage between paternal half siblings was legal until the days of King David (2 Sam 13:12-13) after which it was regarded as incestuous (Lev 20:17).

Patai (1960:22) points out that for a long time the view continued to be held that the most suitable wife for a Hebrew patriarch was his sister even

⁵⁰ The poem entitled 'Set me free, my sister' includes both 'brother' and 'sister' epithets;

'The brother brought me to his house,
Made me lie on its ... honey bed,
My precious sweet, having lain by my heart,
In unison, the 'tongue-making' is unison,
My brother of fairest face, made 50 times.
... 'Set me free my sister, set me free,
Come my beloved sister, I would go to the palace,
You will be a little daughter before my father,
I will set free for you ...'

ANET (1969, 645)

⁵¹ The following poem from the P. Harris 500 manuscript is a typical example;
I will lie down inside,
and then I will feign illness.
Then my neighbours will enter to see,
and then (my) sister will come with them.
She'll put the doctors to shame,
(for she) will understand my illness.

Fox (1985, 13)

although in real life such a marriage would not have been acceptable. Indeed the marriage of siblings is implicit in the stories concerning the origins of the world (Gen 4-5) and the perpetuation of the human race after the flood (Gen 10). It is also a source of irony in the story concerning Abraham who presents Sarah, his wife, as his sister in order to save his own skin (Gen 12:10-16; 20:12-18). He has not told an untruth (Gen 20:12). He simply counts on the fact that Pharaoh will not necessarily reckon his sister also as his bride. The lovers of the Song however use the epithets of brother and sister not because they accurately reflect their actual relationship nor because they belong to the mythical world of the patriarchs. In the Song, the ties of kinship have simply become a metaphor for love. The epithet 'my sister' declares his wonder before this woman who, though a stranger, seems always to have been known to him. She is at once אָחִי his sister (4:9,10,12; 5:1,2) and the woman of his choice אִשְׁתּוֹ (4:9,10,12; 5:1), his bride. Likewise he to her, is both אָחִי 'brother' (8:1), אֶלֶף 'lover' (1:13,14,16; 2:3,8,9,10,16; 4:16; 5:4,5,6,10,16; 6:2,3 etc.) and רֵעַ 'friend' (5:16).

In the description of the perfection of his beloved, not only does her lover claim that she is unique (6:9) but he stresses the harmony of her form. The language of twinship is particularly evocative in this respect. Twice, and in almost identical terms, the perfect formation of her glistening teeth is compared to the emergence of ewes and their young from the water (4:2ab; 6:6). Each of these ewes bears twins (4:2c; 6:6c תִּמְתְּ אֵימָרָה). The very form of this feminine plural noun draws attention to duality on account of the repetition, in the same order of הָ and הֵ. Moreover the feminine singular adjective אֲבֵלָה (4:2d) 'bereaved' echoes אֲבֵלָה in the preceding colon (4:2c).

The scarlet thread which marks the meeting of her lips (4:3a) and the pomegranate halves which characterise her rosy cheeks (4:3c) both call upon the notion of division to emphasise the duality evoked above (4:2). In addition, the ordinal number שְׁנַיִם 'two' (4:5a) echoes שְׁנִי 'scarlet' (4:3a). Both recall the metaphor of her teeth טְשִׁי with which the theme of duality began.

The motif of twinship characterises her breasts which are compared to two fawns, the twins of a gazelle (4:5; 7:4). The expression is the same in both chapters, except that it is elaborated in 4:5 by an evocation of the delight her lover takes in them (4:5c). As suggested above, a strange reversal has taken place, for her suckling breasts themselves now suck. The twinship motif is emphasised by the adjective שְׁנַיִם on both occasions (4:5a; 7:4a).

The language of twinship expresses the perfection of the beloved's form, just as the language of kinship expresses the close bond forged between the lover's. The beloved's relationship with her own brothers however is less ideal. Whilst she wishes her lover were her brother (8:1), her relationship with her own brothers is very bad. It is against this backcloth that the language of kinship is set.

The beloved's brothers appear in a very poor light at the beginning of the Song, angry with her for some reason (1:6). There is linguistically a very close relationship between the sun which has scorched her, the stares of the daughters of Jerusalem and the anger of her brothers. This relationship however fails to disclose the solution to the enigma, rather it intensifies it.

The relationship is as follows: the beloved begs the daughters of Jerusalem not to 'look' at her (ܐܠܟ ܐܢܝܢ) because the sun has "glanced" at her (ܩܝܠܝܬܐ), that is, burnt her.⁵² It is however her brothers who are responsible on account of their anger which has "burned" against her (ܐܠܟܐܢܐ).⁵³ In 1:6 the activity proper to one subject is applied metaphorically to the next in sequence. Thus it is that the sun (1:6b), like the daughters of Jerusalem (1:6a), metaphorically glances (1:6b) and that her brothers (1:6c), like the sun (1:6b), metaphorically burn (1:6c).

The responsibility for her blackness which is evidently the source of her malaise and need to justify herself, seems to be laid squarely on her brothers' shoulders. They are the ones who imposed upon her the heavy manual labour which has so damaged her complexion. The foreshortening which takes place in the final colon (1:6e), the result of which is to identify the vineyard with her very self, alters our perspective to such a degree as to make us wonder whether her brothers' imposition of such a task was not in response to the violation of some moral norm from which they sought in vain to protect her. Is it the family honour which is at stake and which arouses their sudden indignation? The issue is probably that of a suitor and the precociousness of a young sister who has already made her choice for herself. It must be remembered that in the Ancient Near East love and marriage are not the concern primarily of individuals but of families who settle between themselves the important economic question of the

⁵² As argued in the Notes to the Text (1) the verb ܩܝܠܝܬܐ means literally 'to see' (cf. Job 20:9; 28:7). A similar root ܩܠܝܬܐ means 'to scorch' or 'burn' (Gen 41:6,23,27). Given that in Aramaic ܐܢܝܢ and ܐܠܟܐܢܐ were interchangeable it is possible to understand how ܩܝܠܝܬܐ could be understood to mean 'to burn'.

⁵³ The verb ܐܠܟܐܢܐ means 'to burn' or 'be angry'.

bride-price. Such a transaction was dependent upon the assurance of her purity. In such a context the brothers' indignation is easily understood (De Vaux 1982, 48-50).

The beloved sees things from a radically different perspective, for she is consumed by a love which is of absolute value in itself and which defies the intrusion of economic concerns (8:7). Indeed she spurns all those who seek to offer money for love. Love, as she has experienced it, is totally free (8:11-12).

Her suffering is intensified by the fact that her brothers are more numerous than she and seem to be able to exercise more pressure on her due to their sheer number.⁵⁴ This is all the more galling given that they are her siblings, the representatives only of an absent paternal authority. Their repressive behaviour, as she interprets it, is echoed in the nightwatchmen who, in like manner use their strength and number to abuse her (5:7).⁵⁵ Like them, they are anonymous and undifferentiated, incapable of any personal relationship with her. Moreover their negative attitude to her sows the seeds of suspicion in the daughters of Jerusalem, before whom she is also made to feel alone and vulnerable (1:5).

⁵⁴ No indication of number is given. They are referred to simply in the plural as בְּנֵי אִמִּי 'my mother's sons' (1:6c).

⁵⁵ Neither are the watchmen named or numbered. They are referred to as the שְׂמֹרֵת, the 'keepers' (5:7a).

The brothers henceforth retreat from the scene to reappear only implicitly in 8:8, their sister at their head. As in 6:9 the beloved is praised by women who may initially have scorned her, so in 8:8 she becomes the spokesmen for her brothers who initially silenced her (1:6).

Not everyone would agree that she is the speaker in 8:8, for the speaker is denoted by an unspecified "we". The suggestion has been made that it is the brothers (Krinetzki 1964, 248), the little sister (Chouraqui 1970, 78) or even anonymous male suitors (Gordis 1974, 75,100). Each of these suggestions involves a manipulation of the text which is unnecessary given the ease with which 8:8 follows 8:7 if the speaker is the same, that is, the beloved. This is the opinion of Landy (1983, 160).

Love, which has run its course in the beloved, implicating her in endless joys and sorrows, makes her cry out in 8:6 with a declaration of its power. With this declaration another story begins, that of the her little sister; the same drama henceforth addresses her. The tone however is no longer that of intense emotion calling forth rhetorical hyperbole (cf. 8:6-8), but that of playful banter by means of which she enters into her brother's game for a moment, only to denounce it.

In the section 8:8-10 another enigma is sealed. It depends, for its success, not on an unexplained action as in 1:5-6, nor on an ambiguous metaphor as in 8:11-12, but on a question which cannot be answered:

"What shall we do for our sister
on the day she is spoken for?"

The question itself is ambiguous. It could refer to a particular moment, the moment a suitor seeks her hand in marriage. Alternatively it could refer to the period when she ceases to be a child and approaches womanhood, the time when the question of marriage and consequently that of her gifts and qualities, begins to arise.

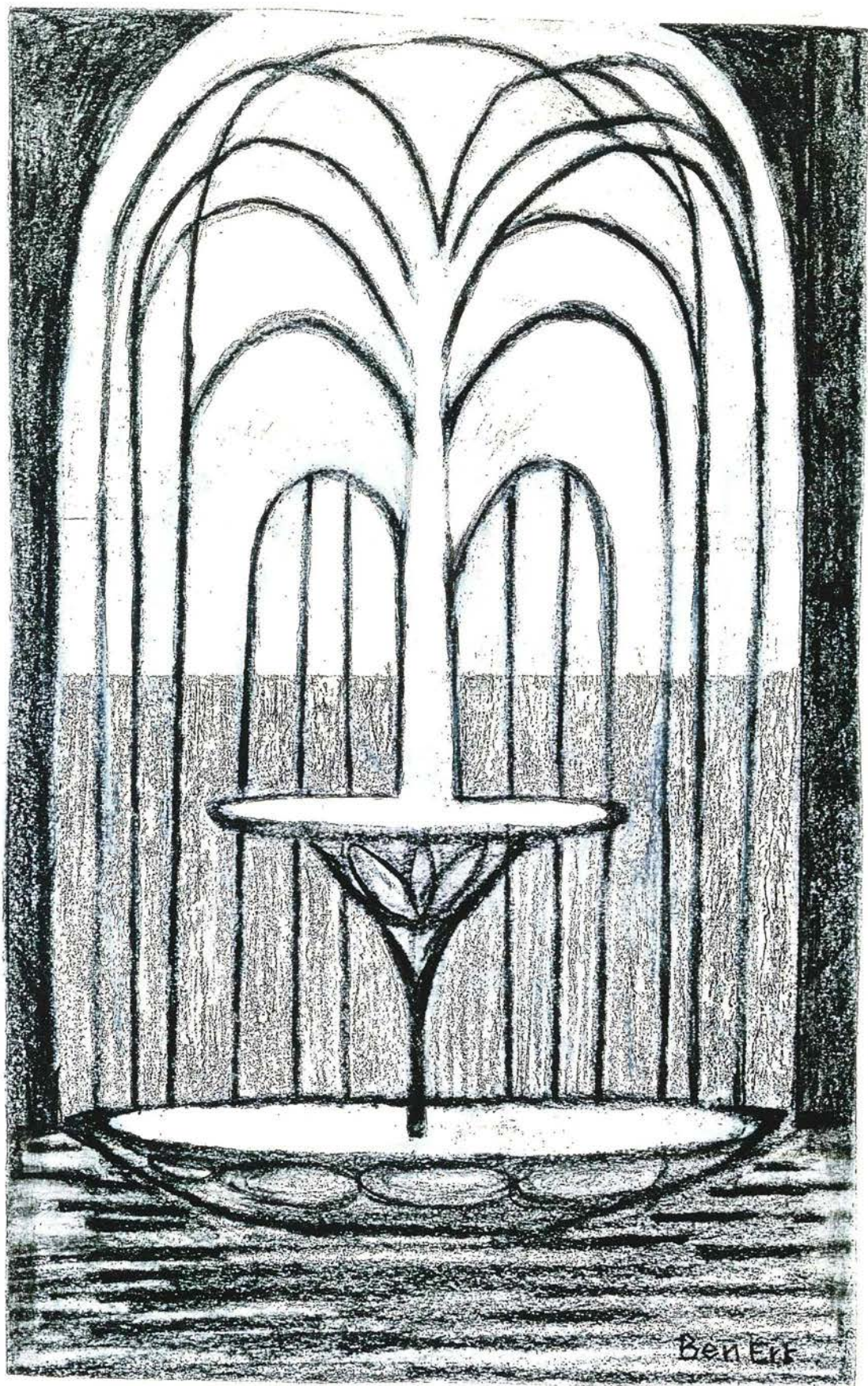
The irony of the question however is precisely that it is unanswerable. Despite all the efforts of her family to determine her destiny, embellish or protect her, she, silent and apparently passive, develops into the individual she already is. Whereas her family would like to determine her future, in reality they must only help her to be herself. Before the impossibility of discovering what she is to be aforesaid, the beloved turns to the past to recount her own story (8:10).

The suggestion as to what the little sister might be, a wall or a door, remains enigmatic, tending more and more towards fantasy, the greater the attempt at precision. The little sister remains a mystery that is sealed, receding ever further from us and from her family the more we seek to determine who she will be. She refuses any attempts to reduce her to an object, however beautiful or precious the object may be. We are given no clue as to whether *waw* (8:8c) connecting the door and the wall is adversative or complimentary, whether to be one or the other is of greater value. We only know that the beloved is a wall and is proud to be so (8:10).

Let us press the images a little more closely. We will soon see their impenetrability. Not only is the *waw* of 8:9c ambiguous but so also is the verb

לָצַד. The root לָצַד may mean either 'to adorn', 'fashion' or 'besiege'. If understood according to the first of these possibilities, the form parallels בָּנֵנוּ, "we will build". This would suggest that the images of the door and wall are complimentary, denoting two kinds of beauty or of temperament, the one hidden and withdrawn, the other assertive and bold (Landy 1983, 160-161). If, on the other hand, with Gordis (1974, 100), we understand the verb to imply some kind of imposed enclosure, we are led to understand the wall and door to be antithetical, the former to represent moral weakness and the latter, chastity.

In addition, there is just a hint of some kind of correspondence between her body and architectural details. On the basis of the association in 8:10 between the beloved's breasts and towers, Landy (1983, 162) draws the conclusion that the wall refers to her torso and the door to female genitalia. This however is more than the poet is willing to specify. The poet challenges the reader with a figure of the enchanting mystery of the human person: that is precisely the metaphor's point.



CHAPTER 4

NATURE IMAGERY

i VINES AND VINEYARDS

The blossoming vines are numbered among the many signs of Spring (2:13; 7:12). They are part of the new growth in which the lovers see the flourishing and burgeoning of their love (2:13; 7:12). There is the hint however that the vineyard sometimes takes on a symbolic dimension, as representative of the beloved or of her relationship with her lover. In contrast to the garden, which is a place of unsullied delight for the lovers, a place where they are withdrawn from the world and free of its cares, the vineyard is presented primarily as a valuable asset, liable to despoliation and in need of constant care and attention. In contrast to the garden which is presented as a place of paradisaical pleasure, the presentation of the vineyard is much more concerned with the socio-economic realities of owning and maintaining it.

The first hint that the vineyard might refer to something other than external reality comes towards the end of 1:6. In the course of the verse, the vineyards entrusted to the beloved's care (1:6d) are contrasted with her own vineyard which has fallen into disrepair (1:6e). The exclamation, 'My own vineyard I did not tend' may indeed refer to an actual vineyard. It may indeed be the exasperated cry of an overworked woman on whom her brothers have placed an impossible burden for some reason. It may also however be another way of saying that she has spent herself working for siblings who fail to care about

her. The anger of her brothers and the relationship of this anger to her present situation is also unexplained. Her servitude in their vineyard may on the one hand be the cause of her self neglect. Alternatively it may be their way of punishing her for the violation of some unspecified norm. Whatever lies behind the neglected vineyard, it is a perfect image of the shame and rejection she feels.

8:11-12 forms an *inclusio* with 1:5-6. The common motifs of 'vineyard' and 'keepers' invite a comparison of the two passages. 8:11-12 begins in the manner of a parable, 'Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-Hamon' (8:11ab). The poet goes on to describe how the vineyard was given over to keepers who give Solomon a proportion of the proceeds at harvest-time (8:11cd). Every effort is made to emphasise the high value of Solomon's vineyard in order to contrast it immediately afterwards with a particular vineyard 'my own vineyard' (8:12a), which is beyond compare. Every effort is also made to distance Solomon from his vineyard - by means of keepers who tend it for him (8:11c) - so as to emphasise the speaker's unique relationship with this one particular vineyard.⁵⁶

There can be little doubt that the reference to 'my own vineyard' is to be understood figuratively, for this same expression is used in 1:6e. There, the narrative suddenly becomes sharply personal and the vineyards of the Palestinian landscape focus on one particular vineyard which becomes a metaphor for the beloved.

⁵⁶ The contrast is reminiscent of the story of Naboth's vineyard in 1 Kgs 21:5-16. There, the king seeks to buy Naboth's vineyard from him. When he refuses, Jezebel plots against him.

The identity of the speaker is less certain. The motif of the beloved's incomparability, expressed by her lover in 2:2 and 6:9, might suggest that it is the lover who praises the beloved. This is the interpretation of Fox (1985, 174), Falk (1982, 133), Murphy (1990, 199) and Keel (1986, 254). According to Fox, the comparison is also between two very different ways of conducting a relationship; whilst Solomon gives his wives over to others to look after, the lover resolves to care for his vineyard himself. Falk states the same case in terms of modern feminism; whereas the lover truly loves and cares for the beloved, Solomon regards his many wives as little more than sex objects.

There is however another way of reading 8:11-12. It could be that the speaker is the beloved and that the vineyard is an image of her self. The paradoxical relationship with 1:6 now comes more clearly into focus, for she who was dismayed (1:6) is now triumphant (8:12), she who spent her energies serving many masters (1:6) is now her own. This interpretation accords well with the triumphant tone of the previous verse (8:10) and with the convention that the initiative of the lover is usually limited to the description of (1:9-11; 4:1-15; 6:4-10; 7:2-7) or dialogue with, his beloved (1:15-17; 2:1-2; 2:10-15; 4:16-5:1).

It is therefore unlikely that it is her lover who suddenly introduces *double entendre* here. The statement is much more characteristic of the beloved who poses a riddle at the very beginning of the Song 1:6. Fox's (1985, 174) argument that 'only the lover can be said to possess a vineyard in the same way that Solomon does' does not reckon with the subtle shifts in perspective of which the poet has already shown himself capable. Moreover the logic of his argument does

not begin to settle the question of the identity of the speaker, for it is equally likely that it is the beloved who rejoices in her loved one. The image of the vineyard may just as readily be a symbol of the lover, as of the beloved, for has she not already eaten of "his fruit" (2:4)?

2:10-14 closes in 2:15 with an urgent imperative to protect the vineyards from foxes which would ravage the vines. Given the context of the imperative, at the end of the lover's summons to his beloved, the reader is pressed to consider the possibility that the vineyard refers not only to the vineyards which are coming into bloom all around them, but to their relationship which is under threat even as the lovers come close to consummating it. The hint is made by the shift from vineyards in general in 2:15c to 'our vineyards' in 2:15d, a reference to the lovers who are full of longing for each other. The declaration of mutual love in the following verse (2:16) strengthens this interpretation.

In each of these passages 1:6, 2:15-16 and 8:11-12 the image of the vineyard must be handled with great care, for the secondary, figurative meanings of which there is only a hint, are difficult to grasp. They lie just beneath the surface and participate in the general atmosphere of love and longing which pervades the countryside.

The image of wine is very obviously related to that of vines and vineyards; just as the blossoming vines anticipate the lovers' meeting (2:13; 6:11; 7:12), so the finest wine describes their long-awaited embrace (1:2; 4:10). On her lips, the image expresses intense longing (1:2). On his, it is an exclamation of sheer joy

(4:10). In each instance the comparison is followed by a reference to the fragrance of the loved one's oils (1:3a; 4:10c). In 1:2b-3a the association is made all the stronger by the presence of the adjective נִיחֵם in both colons. The reference to the scent of the vines in 2:13 brings together and projects into the natural world certain aspects of both these images; whereas in 1:2-3 and 4:10 the image of wine relates to the taste of the loved one's kisses, in 2:13 the scent of the vines is a sign of Spring. To the lovers however, they convey much more than that; their burgeoning anticipates reunion with the loved one who is tasted, touched, felt and smelt.

A third verse (7:10) bears some similarity to 1:2 and 4:10, for here the beloved's kisses, literally 'her palate' are compared to the 'finest of wine' (7:10a). More than previously however, the poet is concerned to describe the actual physical transmission of the kiss and its passage from the beloved's mouth to her lover. There is no better way of communicating the reciprocity of this embrace than by means of a dialogue.⁵⁷

Lover	... and your kisses like the best wine
Beloved	flowing smoothly to my beloved,
Lover	passing over my lips and teeth

The full impact of this dialogue is discerned only in the wider context of the verse, for the comparison of the beloved's kisses to the 'finest wine' is the

⁵⁷ The presence of dialogue in this verse is justified in the Notes to the Text (2).

cumulation of a description which began in 7:8 with a word in praise of her stately stature;

‘There you are, stately as a palm tree,
your breasts like its clusters’

This description then takes on a life of its own as the lover determines to climb the palm tree and grasp its fronds;

I said, ‘let me climb the palm
and grasp its fronds’

The desire to ‘grasp’ his beloved, acknowledged in 7:9b is subsequently linked specifically to her breasts (7:9c) which are compared to the clusters of the vine (7:9d). Then, as in 1:2 and 4:10, the intimacy which touching the beloved affords her lover, also brings him to an awareness of her fragrance. Thus it is that he wishes aloud (7:9c-e):

‘Oh may your breasts be like clusters of the vine,
and your breath sweet-scented like apricots’

In 7:10 this wish is miraculously fulfilled, for no sooner than her lover fills out his longing with another expression of desire for her kisses (7:10c), than his beloved responds by completing his sentence on his behalf (7:10b). The likening of her kisses to wine, which flows from one lover to another, is the perfect culmination of the sequence.

Some of the main differences between the image of the vineyard and that of the garden have been noted. There are however certain similarities. Both are marked off for a particular purpose, the vineyard for cultivation, the garden for pleasure. Both, at times, symbolise the unique integrity of the beloved; the

beloved is a vineyard, neglected and abused in 1:6, but she is also the garden of her lover in 4:12-5:1. The two images are brought yet closer together by means of the network of motifs which they share; wine is discovered in the garden of the beloved (5:1), just as wine, in 1:2 and 4:10 is associated with the exchange of kisses. Characteristic of these kisses is the joyful recognition of the fragrance of each other's oils, a fragrance which is present both in the blossoming vines (2:13) and in the garden (4:16). Moreover the fragrance of the garden is that of the spices that grow therein (4:14; 5:1), the same spices to which the beloved's oils are compared in 4:10.

Many of these associations come together in the beloved's promise to give her lover 'spiced wine' to drink (8:2c). The reference to wine is reminiscent of the association between drink and lovemaking (1:2; 4:10) and the spices which give it a special tang are reminiscent of the delights of her garden (4:14; 5:1). The mention of pomegranates (8:2d) consolidates this association for they too grow in abundance there. The pronominal suffix (׃), as in 1:6, 2:15 and 8:12, is the clue of the symbolic dimensions of the imagery. The offer of 'the juice of my pomegranates' is none other than the offer of her breasts.

One final reference to wine remains. It is that of 7:3 in which the beloved's navel is likened to a rounded bowl. So lovely is the bowl that it is the wish of her lover that it never lack wine, the exact word for which is a hapax in the OT. Wine here is not an image of lovemaking but rather of abundance and plenitude. It appears in the context of other such images, for example that of a

pile of wheat (7:3). Spring, with its blossoming vines is no longer the implied season. Rather it is Autumn.

The nature of the 'house of wine' (2:4) has provoked much discussion. Found nowhere else in the OT, it is probably a shortened form of *בית המשתה יין* which is found in Esth 7:8. There, it describes King Ahasuerus' banqueting hall, a room designated for the purpose in his palace. Queen Vashti may also have held a banquet there (Esth 1:9) as did Queen Esther (Esth 7:1).

Such banquets were also held outside in the palace garden, in a marquee (Esth 1:6) or pavilion.⁵⁸

Not all the references to *בית המשתה יין* are located in regal setting. In Eccles 7:2 and Jer 16:8 the setting is not specified, leaving open taverns and wedding festivities to be the likely context. Indeed in the light of the reference to 'the voice of the bridegroom' and 'the voice of the bride' which follow immediately thereafter in Jer 16:9, it would seem likely that the place of feasting referred to is the place where wedding celebrations were held.

References such as these have encouraged critics to identify the 'house of wine' with banqueting hall or tavern, depending on their view of the Song's overall function (Robert 1963, 102). A third option is proposed by Pope (1977,

⁵⁸ King Assurbanipal is seen sitting with his wife in a garden pavillion. The relief, dating ca. 640, comes from his palace in Nineveh (Keel 1986, 87, fig 38).

210-229) who identifies it as a place of sacral celebration in the context of funerary rites.

In the light of the regal imagery of 2:4, it is as a 'banqueting hall' that I have translated that phrase, without wishing thereby to imply any particular provenance for the Song. In this context it is a hyperbolic image, comparable to her declaration a few verses later, that she is 'sick with love' (2:5c).

The fauna of the Song, like the flora, are highly varied. There are domestic animals such as sheep and goats which are associated with a pastoral way of life. These are seen moving over the hillside in search of fresh pasture land and watercourses. There are also gazelles, hinds and young stags who naturally roam the open spaces, moving from high to lowland according to season, animals associated with the hunt and with the royal park. Wild predators, hostile to man, also have a place in the Song. There are lions and leopards in the heights and little foxes who make destructive forays into the orchards of the cultivated countryside.

Some of these animals display particular characteristics which disclose something about the lovers and their relationship. They are a rich source of imagery for the *wasfs* or descriptive songs. More often they add movement and vitality to the natural world in which the relationship grows, mirroring the lovers' struggles and their joys. There is nothing sentimental about nature in the Song.

Ewes with their lambs and goats with their kids constitute the pastoral scene of 1:7-8. Even though the beloved is in some tension with the scene, the image is nevertheless one of rest and repose, of harmony between man and beast; the shepherd moves with his flock, lying down with them at noon at a suitable watering place. The beloved too participates in this general movement, for she too is depicted temporarily as a shepherdess in charge of her flock (1:8c).

Though the pastoral scene appears to fade never to return again with any consistency, an echo of it is to be found in the extended metaphors of 4:1-2 and 6:5-6. They describe the beloved's vivacious curls and her glistening white, perfectly regular teeth. The metaphors used to describe these parts of her body are so highly developed as to overshadow the objects described. Rather than concentrate upon her hair and teeth, we become preoccupied with the beautifully balanced descent of the goats down the hillside and the ascent of the shorn ewes and their lambs up the other side.

These are moreover no ordinary beasts; the ewes are clean and healthy and each is flanked by two sturdy lambs, an image reminiscent of Isa 40:11. The aim is to convey the beloved's feminine maturity and capacity for motherhood every bit as much as it is to describe her hair and teeth. The pastoral motifs have introduced another, undisclosed agenda.

Young deer and gazelles frequently appear in the Song, particularly in association with the lover. His energetic visits to and from his beloved's door (2:8-9,17; 8:14) recall the agility of these shy animals whose swiftness is well documented in the OT (2 Sam 2:18, 1 Chr 12:9; Sir 27:20; Isa 35:6; Hab 3:19). In Ps 42:2 the psalmist's yearning for God is described in terms of a doe longing for 'streams of water'. The lover's longing for his beloved is also the motivation of his flight to her door (2:8-9).

The motif appears for the first time in 2:9. The lover, whose imminent arrival is announced in 2:8, progressively takes on the appearance of a gazelle, an

image which fits perfectly the verbs 'to leap' (לָקַח) and 'to bound' (לָקַח) which characterise his enthusiastic advance. The simile persists throughout the verse with the result that we see simultaneously a gentle stag and an expectant lover waiting at the beloved's door (2:9c-f). The tension, and likewise the ambiguity, are broken in 2:10 when, at last, he speaks. With his words, the image of the lovely gazelle immediately fades and the lover takes on once more the full stature of a man.

His request to her to come away with him (2:10f) is followed by her joyful declaration of their mutual belonging to one another (2:16). Her song of delight however stops short when she abruptly dismisses him to the mountains of Bether (2:17). This unexpected command parallels his spontaneous arrival over the mountains in 2:8. On both occasions he is likened to a gazelle or a young stag which moves quickly through the countryside.

A similar command marks the close of the Song (8:14). Rather than close the Song however, the effect is to assure us that the Song will never end. The lovers will evermore be engaged in love's game of hide and seek.

A new serenity possesses the beloved in 8:14. She, mistress not of one, but of an unspecified number of gardens, dismisses her lover calmly from within the seclusion of its walls, confident that he, who has endlessly sought her, will never cease to come to her. She, who is most often associated with interior environments and remains behind doors (5:2-6) or behind windows (2:9), has the maturity to realise that he, on the other hand, belongs to the open spaces and

must be, like a gazelle, totally free. Thus her paedagogy to younger women begins, in the knowledge that where he is, she is present also, even in the far-off mountains where the scent of spices recalls the intimacy of her garden (4:14).

When the image of the gazelle is applied to the beloved, it is not primarily on account of the agility of the animal but because of its grace and beauty, those same qualities which make the image of the doe appropriate in the characterisation of the ideal wife in Prov 5:19. It is these qualities too which make the image of the gazelle appropriate to the evocation of the beloved in the love poetry of Emmanuel of Rome (Carmi 1981, 423):

‘Tell me lovely gazelle; do you take the stars of heaven for your eyes?’

As regards the beloved, it is her youthful femininity which the young animals highlight. In 4:5 her breasts are described as ‘two fawns, twins of a gazelle’ for, like these animals, they are perfectly balanced, and dappled, like their coat. The maternal function of her breasts is evoked by a transformation of this imagery whereby the young fawns which initially describe the perfection of her form, subsequently anticipate the presence of her lover at her side. The twin fawns cease to be identified with her breasts. Instead they proceed to feed on them (4:5c). With this development tenor and vehicle are less precisely related to each other than before (4:5a). Now there is no explicit association between breasts and water-lilies. This however is the conclusion to which the reader seems inevitably drawn.

It has often been said that gazelles and deer were associated with love in the Ancient Near East. Keel (1986, 89-94) demonstrates this point with reference to iconography, Pope (1977, 386), with reference to Mesopotamian magical spells. Keel implies that associations with the love goddess are implicit in the Song by means of these animals which are her representatives. This is especially true of the adjurations of 2:7 and 3:5 where the animals are invoked in an oath. It is more likely however, that the association in 2:7 and 3:5 is not so much with love but with speed of movement and freedom; whilst love is dormant, the daughters of Jerusalem are as free as the gazelles and hinds of the field. Once love is awoken, all this will change. Moreover as Gordis (1974, 26-28) has argued, the animals are mentioned in order to avoid using the divine name. According to him, the poet "replaces such customary oaths as *bē'elohei s'bhā'oth* or *b'el šaddai* by a similar sounding phrase *biš'bhā'ōth b'ay 'lōth hassādah* 'by the gazelles and hinds of the field', choosing animals which symbolise love, for the substitutions". He is also careful to emphasise that this reticence to use the divine name is deeply characteristic of Jewish tradition.

Even as the gazelle is the animal particularly associated with the lover, so the dove is most often, though not exclusively, associated with the beloved. Her eyes are likened to doves for the first time in 1:15, in a mellifluous verse in praise of the beloved. The second colon, in which the comparison is situated, develops and makes more precise the first, which is a general declaration of her beauty. Her dove-like eyes thereby become the focus of her loveliness.

The metaphor is particularly appropriate because the ם and ן of ם״ן ן״ם ן״ם ן״ם echo sounds which are already well established in the verse. Moreover these same sounds are taken up in the response of the beloved who subsequently models her words of praise of him on his address to her (1:16a). It has often been asked in what way her eyes resemble doves? Aquila, Peshitta and Vg understand the image to refer not the birds themselves, but to their eyes. On the basis of Egyptian artistic convention, Gerleman (1964, 114) suggests that it is the shape of the bird that is called upon. Much more clear than the objective correspondence which remains ambiguous, are the qualities of gentleness (Matt 10:16), delicacy and liveliness which her lover perceives in them. Just as doves draw attention to themselves by means of their call (Ezek 7:16; Isa 38:14; 59:11), so the beloved's eyes are a focus of her charm.⁵⁹

It is these same qualities of vivacity and delicate beauty that one discovers in his eyes later in the Song (5:12). The simile of 5:12 far exceeds in its detail the simple metaphor of 1:15, yet the use of the same basic imagery discloses how very deeply the two protagonists love each other; they describe each other using the same language and hence convince the reader that they are not two but one.

The initial comparison of his eyes to doves (5:12a) takes on a life of its own in subsequent colons as the poet describes how these doves sit quietly in a pool of milky foam. The image is surely of a river in spate and of doves riding

⁵⁹ It is not surprising that the beloved's ability to charm is mediated by means of her eyes, for, as Murphy (1990, 159) points out, they were recognised in the OT to be the vehicle of a woman's power (Prov 6:25; Sir 26:9).

the current which sends up foam. It is an image of serene steadiness amid turbulent movement, describing both the steadiness and liveliness of his gaze.

As with 1:16, attempts have been made to identify different parts of the lover's eyes. It is only with the reference to milk however (5:12c) that the reader is encouraged to make an association with the whites of the eye. In the Keret legend (KTU 1.14, iii 43) the eyelashes of a girl form the rim of a bowl filled with 'frothy milk'. If an awareness of the whites of the eye does impose itself in 5:12, this does not necessarily imply that the iris and pupil are also to be identified in the imagery. Moreover, in someone of a swarthy complexion, the whites of the eyes are surely the most prominent feature. Indeed they contrast markedly with the darkness of his hair, which is 'black as a raven' (5:11c).

Apart from its beauty and vivacity, the dove is also notable for its shyness (Jer 48:28). It is this quality which is emphasised in 2:14. In this verse the lover addresses his beloved as a dove which he seeks to coax out of its mountain fastness.

Just as in 2:9 the memory of the metaphor of the gazelle persists in the subsequent colon - in the arrival of the beloved at the door and his peering through the window - so the image of the dove lingers as he makes the request to see the beloved's face and to hear her voice (2:14cd). The request is equally appropriate to the coy bird hidden in the cleft of the rock as to a woman, for it refers to the loveliness of the creature and to its song. The reader knows very well however that it is primarily to the beloved that the lover makes his request.

Indeed his desire to see her face and to hear her voice reverses the sequence of his own spontaneous coming (cf. 2:8-9), just as her reticence is the opposite of his unrestrained enthusiasm.

4:1a-b repeats 1:15 exactly, but for the addition of a third colon, 4:1c, which adds shyness and discretion to her beauty. She is beautiful, her eyes are like doves, yet they are barely seen behind her veil. This inaccessibility, alluded to in 2:14, adds mystery and charm to her loveliness.

The motif of the dove appears in one other instance in the Song. The voice of the turtledove is one of a host of indications that Spring has come and that the time for love is near (2:12). It is on hearing the voice of the turtledove that the lover anticipates his beloved's voice (2:14) in response to his own (2:8). On addressing her as a dove (2:14) he seeks to encourage her to participate in the preparations for love which are already evident in nature.

While the beloved is mild and douce as a dove, she also displays the awesome strength of a mare from the royal stables (1: 3). Contrary to Pope (1977, 337-8), who suggests that the image is one which induces sexual excitement,⁶⁰ it is an image of great nobility and dignity in accordance with all those other courtly images which describe the splendour of the beloved. The reader must not

⁶⁰ Pope (1977, 338) likens the presence of a mare among the stallions of Pharaoh's chariotry to the episode related in ANET (1967, 241) in which a mare was deliberately set loose among an enemy army in order to wreck havoc there. This interpretation, he claims, solves the difficulty of numerical incongruity in the verse.

imagine that she is all sweetness and light. She is also strong and courageous, a formidable opponent to the enemies of love.

The lions and leopards which inhabit the formidable mountain tops of Senir and Hermon, and the little foxes who ravage the orchards and vineyards of the cultivated countryside are the counterparts in the world of nature of the beloved's brothers and of the city watchmen, that is, of the enemies of love. The destructive power of foxes to destroy a good crop is noted in the Samson story (Jgs 15:4-5) and in the poetry of Theocritus, whilst the danger presented by leopards and lions is well documented in the OT (Jer 5:6; Hos 13:7).

The meaning of the enigmatic imperative of 2:15 has been widely discussed. It has been read as a wish spoken by either lover that nothing be allowed to harm the beloved, who at that moment reaches maturity and blossoms like a fruitful vine. It may also refer to nubile, young women whom youths are eager to set upon. The little foxes would therefore correspond to the lustful lovers of Egyptian love songs. The third proposition, that of Delitzsch (1875), and the one I prefer, is that the imperative articulates the wish, common to both lovers, that nothing be allowed to spoil their love. The imperative follows the lover's discreet wooing of his beloved (2:10-14) and precedes their joyful union, to which she responds with a song of praise (2:16). The speaker of 2:15 is passed over in silence, for whoever speaks, speaks for them both. It is a word murmured in anticipation, a word not about her, nor about any other young women, but about their relationship. The pronoun "our" which accompanies the vineyards in 2:15d is the decisive clue.

The menace constituted by the foxes is diffused by the diminutive "little" which precedes the noun in the second colon (2:15b). The adjective lends a teasing element to their destructiveness. They are not a real danger but only an annoying menace to the security of the vineyard.

The rapid incursions the little foxes might make is conveyed by the form of the verse; each of the two principal clauses (2:15ac) is taken up and developed in a second colon (2:15bd) which, to a large extent repeats the material of the first. The verse thereby appears to advance in steps.

A graver threat is constituted by the lions and leopards that roam the peaks of Senir and Hermon and from which the lovers flee (4:8). Fox (1984, 134-135) points out that these animals and place-names have been deliberately chosen because of their phonetic association with the delights of the secluded garden (4:12-5:1) with which the mountain peaks form an awesome contrast. Indeed the wild beasts never approach the lovers to harm them. They rather constitute a wild and majestic backdrop to their love.

Flowers are often used in the OT to evoke the transitory nature of human life (Ps 103:15; Job 14:2; Isa 28:1; 40:6,7,8). In the Song they are associated with the invitation to the lovers to recognise that Spring has come and that the time of love is near.

The first appearance of this theme is in 2:12-13 where the arrival of spring flowers is associated with the call of the dove, with the appearance of newly formed figs and blossom on the fragrant vines. The theme reappears in 6:11 and in 7:12.

It is not coincidental that the fullness of love, that is, the union of the lovers, is described in terms of a variation of these images - the ripened grapes, harvested, and already made into wine, are frequently an image of lovemaking (1:2; 4:10) and the ripened grape on at least one occasion is an image of the breasts for which he longs (7:9). An orchard of pomegranates (4:13) awaits the loved one who comes to his beloved's garden to delight in her, and ripened fruits over the beloved's door are a token of their intimacy within (7:13). The difference is only in the maturity of the ripening process - the progress of the season maps the climate of their love.

The fruits which bedeck the lovers' door (7:14b) are accompanied by the scent of mandrakes (7:14a); together they announce joyfully that indeed the time for love has come. The appearance of mandrakes (מָגֵן מָגֵן) in the place where she

promises to give her lover (ללל) her love (לללל) stresses most emphatically the congruence between the processes of nature and the events of love. The play on the root ללל, meaning 'lover', 'mandrake' and 'lovemaking' reinforces the associations with fertility which the plant enjoyed throughout the ancient world.⁶¹ In particular, it is reminiscent of the story recounted in Gen 30:14-16 in which Leah conceives and bears a son to Jacob thanks to the mandrakes gathered for her.

The flowers most frequently mentioned in the Song are the לללל (2:1; 4:5; 5:13; 6:2; 7:2), the identity of which has been hotly debated. On the basis of LXX's rendering *krinon*, and Vg *lilium*, the flower has traditionally been associated with the *lilium candidum* or madonna lily, a flower proved to be native to Palestine (Moldenke 1952, 164). As such it is an image of great delicacy, evocative of the purity and simplicity of the beloved.

Another possibility however is that the flower belongs to the *nymphae* or water-lily family and that the form לללל is a loan-word borrowed from the Egyptian sššn or sšn, 'lotus' (Tournay 1988, 58). Herodotus (II, 92) is a help here,

⁶¹ On an Egyptian wall painting, dated ca. 1340, an Egyptian queen is depicted holding two mandrakes and a lotus bud to her husband's nose (Keel 1986, 239). Her open dress is suggestive of her amorous intentions. It is a common motif in Egyptian love poetry (Fox 1985, 8,9,12,31). In the Greek world, the mandrake was an epithet of Aphrodite (Pope 1977, 648). At Ugarit too, the plant is associated with love although the exact significance of putting the plant into the ground (KTU 1.3 iv 24,30) is a matter of debate. According to De Moor (1979, 9) it is a gesture in favour of peace. According to Gibson (1976, 51) the gesture was in favour of bringing rain to water earth.

for he writes ca. 430BC that what is known in the Greek world as a lily, is called a lotus in Egypt. This explains why LXX read $\aleph \beth \psi \psi$ as it did.

Although the Egyptian water-lily, the lotus, is not native to Palestine, there is evidence that the *nymphaea alba*, the white water-lily or the *nymphaea caerulea*, the blue water-lily did grow there (Moldenke 1952, 154-155). Moreover the Egyptian water-lily, the *nymphaea lotus*, would have been known if not in its natural habitat, then by means of artistic representation, for as Pope suggests (1977, 368) the motif appears on Egyptian, Canaanite and even Solomonic artifacts.⁶² The Egyptian love poets too draw on this motif (Fox 1985, 9,12,32).

With the choice of this second option, the balance of the imagery is altered significantly, for the water-lily implies the implicit presence of water wherever the flower appears. It implies that the valleys of 2:1 are river valleys, that the fawns feeding on water-lilies in 4:5 are feeding by the water's edge and that the water-lilies growing in the garden (6:2) are dependant upon pools or irrigation canals.

Each of these images is in some way appropriate to the beloved; she is a water-lily growing quietly by the river bank, shrouded by thorns and thistles (2:1), she is the one whose breasts suggest the luxuriant water-lilies on which favoured

⁶² Pope (1977, 368) draws attention to the presence of the motif on Canaanite Astarte plaques. Keel (1986, 80) presents drawings of goblets in the shape of lotus flowers, found in Egypt and Palestine. He also depicts (1986, 109) a Meggido ivory in which a Canaanite warrior king is handed a lotus flower by his lady. As regards Israel, he agrees with Moldenke (1952, 154) that the Phoenician artists who worked on the Temple designed capitals inspired by lotus flowers (1 Kgs 7:19,22,26).

fawns may feed⁶³ (4:5), she is the garden to which her lover goes down to gather water-lilies (6:2), a metaphor for her special charms.⁶⁴ The implicit presence of water on each of these occasions is entirely appropriate, for the beloved is not only a 'locked garden' (4:12) but also a 'fountain sealed' (4:12), a garden fountain (4:15), a well of living water (4:15).

The association of the flower with water also helps make sense of 5:13. There, her lover's lips are likened to lilies which distil liquid myrrh. The image is of the spreading petals of the water-lily. They mirror the mouth-watering nature of his anticipation. The liquid myrrh which falls from these water-lilies is inspired by the water in which the plants grow. There is no such ready an explanation as regards the madonna lily.

There is one other flower mentioned in the Song, namely the חַכְּצִלֵּה, the exact nature of which is unknown. It appears elsewhere only once, namely Isa 35:1. LXX and Vg are non-committal in their translation, using only the generic terms *anthos* and *flos*. The Targum is a little more decisive and translates 'narassus'. Möldenke (1952, 234) agrees that the form most likely does describe some sort of bulb, crocus, an asphodel, a hyacinth or narcissus. Following LXX and Vg however, I have simply translated the word by 'flower' on the grounds that

⁶³ Herodotus (II, 92) also testifies to the edibility of various parts of the water-lily. According to him the root of the lotus is sweet to the taste and that the seeds of water-lily may be eaten fresh or dried.

⁶⁴ Tournay (1988, 58) points to Egyptian paintings which depict the harvesting of lotuses. He also draws attention to the erotic associations of going to the marshes to gather papyrus; in 'The Story of Herdsman', a woman tries to seduce a shepherd by a papyrus marsh.

the point the beloved is making in 2:1 is that she is indistinguishable from the other flowers of the field. Her lover however turns her modesty to highest praise; you, he responds, outshine all your peers, as a water-lily far surpasses in beauty, the briars and thorns which surround it (2:2).⁶⁵

With these words she models her praise of him upon his praise of her; as an apricot tree surpasses all the trees of the wood, so her lover is beyond compare *vis-à-vis* other young men (2:3).⁶⁶ The sturdy apricot tree henceforth becomes an appropriate image for her lover who, with masculine chivalry and with fatherly tenderness, shelters his young bride (2:3cd). At this point however, the simile of 2:1-2 is replaced by a metaphor which leaves the object of the image of the fruit undeclared. The sweetness of the fruit of the tree is presumably a discrete reference to the tenderness of the youth's embrace (2:3d).

The imagery of flowers and trees which describes first her modesty (2:1) and then his chivalry (2:3) parallels and reverses that of 1:13-14 in which she shelters him in her arms; he is to her a spray of henna blossom, its fragrant flowers are held in her embrace. Usually it is she, who, on account of her

⁶⁵ In my translation I have exceptionally shortened 'water-lily' to 'lily' in order to avoid too cumbersome a rendering in this swift dialogue between the lovers (2:1-3).

⁶⁶ A decision also had to be made as to the identification of תפוח. Its etymology is תפח, 'to breathe', suggesting a fragrant fruit. Moldenke (1952, 184-5) argues for the *prunus armeniaca* the 'apricot tree', on the grounds that this shady tree is native to Palestine and its fruit sweet and fragrant. It therefore satisfies all the requirements of the imagery of the Song (2:3,5; 7:9). The traditional rendering, 'apple' (KJ, RSV) is possible, now that a quantity of charred apples have been found at Sinai (Keel 1986, 92). Their acidity however works against the interpretation.

delicate, feminine beauty is likened to a flower. In 1:13-14 however, the roles are reversed.

The apricots which bring her such joy in 2:3 are the very fruits she later longs for, in order to heal the wound of his absence. In her great yearning for him, raisin cakes⁶⁷ and apricots act as a substitute for what food and drink can never provide (2:5).

Apricots are also used by the lover in the context of longing. In 7:9 the scent of his beloved's breath is likened to the fragrance of apricots. This fragrance is but a prelude to the kisses which he anticipates and which he compares to a good wine. Good wine is favoured for its bouquet, a bouquet with which the scent of apricots is associated here.

The motif of the apricot tree appears for the last time in 8:5c. Whereas 8:5ab is probably uttered by the daughters of Jerusalem, 8:5c seems to be spoken by the beloved herself. *S* prefers to limit her initiative. Contrary to the vocalisation of the MT, it attributes 8:5b to her lover.

The image recalls that of 2:12. There, the lover is likened to an apricot tree which shelters the beloved and gives her its fruit. In 8:5, he takes her place under the apricot tree and as he lies in its shade, she comes to awaken him.

⁶⁷ These cakes or biscuits probably consisted of dried, pressed grapes. They are associated with the fertility cult in Hos 1:3 but not in 2 Sam 6:19 or 1 Chron 16:3.

The use of the verb אָרָא in this verse reminds the reader of those adjurations in which the beloved pleads with the daughters of Jerusalem not to arouse love prematurely (2:7; 3:5; 8:4). There, the subject was the abstract noun 'love' and the verb was translated by 'to arouse' or 'stir up'. Here however the subject is her lover, hence one is more inclined to translate the same verb אָרָא by 'awake'. The convergence of the verb אָרָא with the motif of the apricot tree may suggest that this awakening has erotic overtones, for the verb is used of her invitation to her lover in 4:16 and the motif of the apricot tree of the lover's 'fruit' in 2:3.

It is also unclear to what event the beloved refers. Does she refer to the relatively recent past, to an occasion on which she awoke him under an apricot tree which was coincidentally also the place of his birth? Or is the awakening to which she refers the birth itself? The parallelism of 8:5de seems to point the reader in this direction, hinting that he was destined for her love from the beginning. This same sentiment is expressed in a Sumerian love song translated by Alster (1985, 154);

‘My (own mother) gave birth to me for your sake,
My ... gave birth to me for your sake.’

The imagery is complicated further by reference to his mother who not only bore him (8:5d) perhaps also conceived him there (8:5a). The uncertainty relates to the translation of the verbs הַבִּלְתָּהּ and הַבִּלָּה . They were discussed in the section entitled Motherhood.

One last ambiguity concerns the tree itself, for the definite article may refer to a particular tree of which the reader is intended to know something. There are many instances in the OT however where the definite article is best translated by the indefinite article (Davidson 1902, 26). The suggestion of a particular tree lends itself to symbolic interpretation and to the discernment of echoes of stories concerning trees in the mythology of the Ancient Near East. In particular, the motif is reminiscent of the tree of life of the Gilgamesh story and of Gen 2-3.

Even if the beloved's words do have a certain timelessness which allows something of the ancient myths to shine through, these echoes are nevertheless subordinate to the lovers very particular, personal story. The reference to her lover's birth under the tree and her identification with his mother's pain is primarily a way of pledging her love to him. It is also a way of acknowledging that suffering is part of love. As suggested in the section on Motherhood, this is a most fitting prelude to the declaration of lover's power in the following verse (8:6).

Not only apricots, but pomegranates too have a place in the Song. On account of the multiplicity of their seeds, they were long considered to be a symbol of fertility and a sign of life in the Ancient Near East.⁶⁸ It is not surprising therefore that they were to be seen decorating the pillars of the temple

⁶⁸ Keel (1986, 134 fig. 76) draws attention to the pomegranate trees which flank the mountain god from whose holy mountain the four rivers flow in the 13th century Assyrian ivory from Assur. The ensemble is evocative of paradise.

(2 Chron 3:16; 4:13) and were embroidered upon the skirts of the priestly robes (Exod 39:25). Moreover they grew in abundance in the Levant, as is evident in the place-name Rimmon (Josh 15:32; Zech 14:10) which derives from the fruit.

Pomegranate blossom is sought in 6:11 as a sign of the arrival of Spring and as confirmation in the external world of the timeliness of love. In 4:3 and 6:7 pomegranates appear in descriptive songs describing the beloved. In both, the open pomegranate is the simile used to describe her rosy cheeks as seen through her veil. Though the images are identical, the context is slightly different. In 4:3 the image follows the description of the beloved's lips, whereas in 6:7 the image follows directly upon the description of her teeth. The impression is however of sequences which mirror each other. This is partly due to the fact that previous to the description of her lips in 4:3, is a description of her teeth almost identical to that of 6:6. The slight element of differentiation does not disrupt the harmony of the whole. Rather, it enhances it.

Between these two identical images is the extended image of the garden (4:12-5:1). There, tenor and vehicle are drawn so closely together that, for a time, the beloved is described in terms of botanical imagery without the mediation of prepositions such as "like" or "as" which would otherwise alert us to the presence of a simile. Indeed the absence of any direct comparison between the parts of her body and the component parts of the garden creates the impression of her diffuse presence throughout the garden. The orchard of pomegranates and the exotic trees and spices all convey her freshness, her fruitfulness, her readiness for love.

Nowhere is the ambiguity between background and foreground more keenly felt than in 8:2. There, the beloved longs to bring her lover to her mother's house. There, she promises him spiced wine and the juice of her pomegranates. This pomegranate juice could refer literally to the juice of the pomegranates growing in her mother's garden. It is much more likely however that the pronoun "my" is an allusion to her breasts.

In the course of these metaphorical transformations different aspects of the pomegranate are called upon. In 6:11 the poet is concerned with its blossom, in 4:3 and 6:7 he is concerned with the colour of the fruit and the arrangement of its seeds and fleshy particles, in 4:13 he dwells upon the abundance of the harvest and finally, in 8:2, he speaks of pomegranate juice. The consistency lent to the Song by the stability of the motif never leads to boredom. On the contrary, the ingenuity with which a single image is employed, gives spontaneity to the Song.

Just as flowers are associated throughout the Song with delicacy and beauty, most often feminine beauty, and fruits with the fullness of love and the maturity of the lovers, so trees are elements of security and stability in the Song. The apricot tree is an image of the lover's protective presence by the side of his beloved in 2:7. In the same way, the image of the palm tree in 7:6 is an image of her awesome strength. In the external world too these same characteristics are displayed; the cedars and pine trees provide a secure bower for the lovers in a world in which they are dispossessed (1:17) and the palanquin which bears King Solomon is made of wood from Lebanon, a solid and enduring material, fit for the carriage of a king.

Trees appear with greatest concentration and variety in the image of the garden (4:13-14).

A multiplicity of different trees appear in the image of the garden (4:13-14). Reference to water both follows (4:15) and precedes (4:13a), creating the impression of an oasis of life.

Remarkable is the impression of proliferation in this passage. This is conveyed partly by means of alliteration which marks not only individual consonants but series of consonants: the sequence פַּר characterises פֶּרֶדֶס (4:13a) and פֶּרִי (4:13b), the sequence קֶן is evident in קֶן הָרֶקֶם וְקֶן מֶרֶץ (4:14b) and the masculine plural ending יָ occurs in פֶּרִי יָ and נֶרְרִי יָ, both in 4:13c. These are particularly effective where, as in the last two examples, the words are in apposition, forming an alliterative pair.

The effect of alliteration changes as the description proceeds. In 4:13c-14b the rather harsh palatals קֶן\ךְ predominate. Then, in 4:14c-e a liquid post-dental comes to the fore. This soft sound reminds the reader of how the description of the garden began, for לֶךְ is alliterative also there (4:12).

The sense of abundance is also conveyed in other ways, namely by the hyperbolic repetition of the adjective לֶכֶּל, 'all' (4:14c,e) and by the juxtaposition of different species, connected either by the conjunction *waw* (4:14a,b,d) or simply by the preposition אִתּוֹ 'with'. The image of the garden, in which these trees flourish, will be discussed in due course.

It has been noted that the Song is a movement, a symphony, an ensemble of shifting images which reach a crescendo and die away. The nuances of this movement depend on the emotions of the lovers who are alternately present and absent to each other, caught in the tide of longing and fulfilment, joy and sorrow. It has also been argued that this repeated experience has a cumulative effect, enabling them finally to cry out triumphantly that love is as strong as death (8:6).

Whilst the recurrence of certain images establishes the continuity of their experience, the increasing prominence of water imagery echoes the growth of their love. It is this movement that will be considered now.

In 1:7 there is no explicit reference to water at all. The beloved simply asks where her lover grazes, where he lies down at noon, presumably to water and graze his flock. Water is present only implicitly in the imagined scene.

Nor is there any explicit reference to water in 1:14 save in the place-name Ein-Gedi, which literally means "spring" or "eye of a kid". Presumably the former is the correct interpretation, for we know that the oasis even today is a sought-after watering-place for a thirsty flock. The association of a kid with water is perhaps also meant to make us cast our mind back briefly to the response made to the beloved in 1:8 where she is to follow the tracks of the flock and pasture her kids by the shepherds tents. The place name Ein-Gedi strengthens retrospectively the image of the thirsty flock seeking water at noon.

Nor is there any direct reference to water in 4:2 though its presence is strongly implied by the reference to 'the washing' (הִרְצָה) from which the shorn ewes emerge, sparkling white (4:2 cf. 6:6).

The first explicit reference to water comes unexpectedly in 4:12 in association with the image of the garden. Even yet however, the imagery is only potential for the beloved is described as a spring that is sealed, an image which draws attention both to her modesty and to the abundant life within her. It is an image of great intensity, indeed all the more so given that it parallels the image of the locked garden which in like manner refuses what it promises, namely rest and refreshment. The image of the sealed *spring* however not only parallels the image of the locked garden but to a degree confuses it, heightening the tension yet further; as Landy points out (1983, 105-106), not only is the beloved associated with the garden and its luscious fruits, but she is also the source of life within it, the spring that makes the garden grow.

Even as the spring cannot be contained but wells up and overflows, so the garden opens, first of all almost imperceptibly in the שֶׁל הַיָּרְדֵּן (4:13a) which could belong to the sphere of influence of either image garden or spring.⁶⁹ The form may refer to water, to the irrigation canals which the sealed spring covertly feeds and which immediately brings forth an orchard of pomegranates. Alternatively it may refer to vegetation, to the shoots of new growth that the mere presence of

⁶⁹ The ambivalence of the term serves to strengthen the parallelism between the spring and the garden and to deny the complete identification of the beloved with either of them.

a spring provokes.⁷⁰ The most important aspect of the form however is the verb from which it comes, namely פָּלַג , 'to send', on account of its energy and dynamism. The immediate consequence of this "sending forth" is the appearance of exotic trees and spices which fill her lover with delight (4:13ef).

It is noteworthy that the image of the sealed spring is also used by the author of Proverbs with reference to female sexuality. It appears in the context of a reproof to the husband who has betrayed his wife's chastity by unfaithfulness to her (Prov 5:16). The beloved of the Song could not be accused of unchastity. Indeed as Elliott (1989, 252) argues, 'The significance of these enclosed images is an absolute unavailability to anyone except the Lover. The door, the seal, the battlements do not represent her will against his desire so much as fidelity that opens and surrenders to him alone.'

Following the description of the luxuriant garden in 4:13c-14, the locked garden and sealed spring are brought into direct relationship with one another. The beloved is hailed as a "garden fountain", a fountain or spring whose waters make fertile not one, but many gardens (פְּרִי גַרְדֵּן). As Landy (1983, 106) points out, the image lends to the beloved universal status for, as the spring fertilises gardens hitherto unknown, so the influence of the beloved animates those around her. The image has the force of a superlative, evoking all the beauty of paradise.

⁷⁰ A detailed analysis of these alternatives is given in the Notes to the Text (1).

In 4:15 water imagery comes to the fore and the image of the garden which was extensively developed in 4:13c-14 cedes to the open spaces of Lebanon (4:15b). The spring which gives rise to a multiplicity of gardens, the well of living waters and the streams which rush down the Lebanese hillside are all characterised by life, movement and unbounded freedom. The plural forms which characterise גַּרְדֵּן 'gardens', חַיִּים 'living' and זָרָח 'streaming', and the parallelism of the three images in the space of two colons (4:15ab), contribute to the impression of abundance and breathless proliferation.

The second image in the sequence, "a well of living water" (4:15a) is an image familiar to us from the OT. The dispute which develops between Issac and the herdsmen of Gerar over the well of living water that Issac's servants dig (Gen 26:19) highlights the vital nature of the commodity to a desert people. It was its life-sustaining quality which made it such an appropriate metaphor for God (Jer 2:13; 17:13). The image is full of movement; the expression "living water" everywhere in the Old Testament designates fresh or running water (Lev 14:5-6, 50-52; 15:13; Num 19:17).

The third image in the sequence depends upon the 'living waters' of the second for the form זָרָח is a verbal form, a plural participle. The provenance of these streaming waters however is no longer a single well but the hollows of the Lebanese hillside (6:15b), hence the inclination to translate the participle by a noun 'streams'.⁷¹ In my translation however I have retained the

⁷¹ In favour of this rendering is the use of the form in Ps. 78:44 parallel to זָרָח, 'streams'.

tenuous link with the 'well of living waters' precisely in order to convey the way in which one element fuses with and grows out of another. The form is highly onomatopoeic, conveying by means of the combination of its sounds, the energetic movement of these cool, clear waters.

The sudden intrusion of Lebanon into a description of the beloved which has evolved around the key metaphors of garden and spring (4:12), introduces a note of ambiguity. The image of the sealed spring and enclosed garden which progressively open to each other to become the source of life for a multiplicity of gardens establishes in our imagination a scene that is perfectly balanced and to which the spring in the heart of the garden is central. The suggestion (4:15b) that the source of life of the garden may not be a spring within, but streams flowing from Lebanon, decisively disrupts this carefully wrought equilibrium. In a passage which so heavily plays on spatial relationships, such a disordering is profoundly disturbing. It forces us to look beyond the garden, to see its glories in the world beyond. The fragrance so recently associated with Lebanon (4:11) helps us in the process, for the heady scents of the numerous trees found in the garden also linger there (4:14,16).

The garden, which is initially an image of the beloved becomes progressively a metaphor of the love between them. The image however never ceases to be specifically associated with the beloved who gives herself entirely to her loved one as food and drink. At this point, the metaphors of garden and spring are brought together in the liquids honey, wine and milk which she offers to him (5:1).

The water, which initially hides itself only to burst forth as the life-giving spring in the garden of the beloved, never again entirely disappears from view. It is implicit in the description of the lover's hair which is drenched with the dew (5:2) and is explicit in the beloved's description of her loved one's eyes (5:12). They are likened to doves precariously balanced on "streams of waters" (5:12), an image which suggests the energetic, even violent course of the melted snows through Israel's narrow ravines. אַפִּיקָי (5:12b) comes from a verb, only used in the hithpoel, meaning "to force, to compel, to restrain oneself". The noun therefore describes the channel which confines the waters that pass through it, often with a degree of forcefulness. The use of the noun in Job 6:5 as an image of the treachery of friends expresses well this violence. The form מַלְאָת (5:12b) has provoked much discussion. As suggested in the section entitled Animals and Birds, it would seem to refer to a river in spate.

The gathering momentum associated with water imagery reaches a climax in 8:7 where love encounters and survives the onslaught of mighty waters and torrential floods. The mythological associations of these primarily natural images have been drawn to our attention by May (1955) and Tromp (1969).

May (1955) directs us to Canaanite mythology, to the conflict between Baal and Yam in which the storm god emerges triumphant over the sea. He suggests that a similar theme pertains in Hebrew mythology; confidence in the power of Yahweh to rescue Israel and to restore the individual sufferer is frequently founded upon belief in Yahweh's victory over the sea and his slaying of Rahab or Leviathan, the sea dragon.

The expression יָם יָבֵשׁ , found in 8:10, is often used in this context (Hab 3:15; 2 Sam 22:17; Ps 18:16; 29:3; Jer 51:13). So also are the common nouns יָם , 'sea' (Job 26:12; Hab 3:15; Ps 74:13; 93:4) and נְהַרִים , 'rivers' (Hab 3:8; Ps 93:3-4). The least frequently used term is נְהַרִים , rivers. It is this term however which parallels יָם יָבֵשׁ in the Song (8:7c) and which is an alternative name for Yam in the Ugaritic text describing the conflict between Baal and Yam (KTU 1.2 I 22,27,30,34,32; KTU 1.2 III 7,9,16,21). It is therefore likely that the יָם יָבֵשׁ and נְהַרִים of 8:7 would have been understood by a Hebrew audience not only as natural images but in terms of its mythology.

Tromp (1969, 64-65) presses the issue further. He cites instances in the Old Testament where these mighty waters (Ps 18:4-5,16; Job 33:22) and rivers (Jon 2:5) are the domain not only of chaos but also of death. The intention of the statement (8:7), that love will not let mighty waters or floods triumph over it must then be to reinforce the impact of the first declaration, namely that love is strong as death (8:6c-d).

This declaration is the only one to be openly mythological for it echoes the phrase 'Mot is strong' in the sixth tablet of the Ugaritic myth (KTU 1.6 VI 20). In 8:6 he is set against the power of love. Love challenges this, the most powerful

of primordial forces in the universe and is victorious.⁷² It is no coincidence that this passage (8:6-8) is the climax of the Song.

It is noteworthy that just as the language of wealth and splendour is subverted at the last moment to describe the immeasurable worth of love, so likewise with regard to water imagery, there is a decisive shift in its usage in the final verses. Whereas up to 8:7 water imagery accompanies and describes the growth of love, in 8:7 it ceases to be a positive element and becomes the foil against which love reveals itself to be a fire whose flames these mighty waters can never entirely quench.⁷³ Love has again broken the limits of the language used to describe it and shows all imagery to be at best, tentative, metaphorical. Water has in the end given way to fire (8:6ef) in the attempt to express its power.

⁷² Mot is not a deity to whom worship is addressed but rather a primordial entity, the personification of death (Gibson 1979, 164). According to Wyatt he is also the first born of El (1990, 207-216). Not only does imagery associated with Mot appear in the Hebrew Scriptures to speak about death and the grave (Jer 9:20; Hos 13:14; Ps 18:6) but the motif of the struggle between Mot and his rival reappears very clearly in Isa 25:8. In that verse God promises to 'swallow up death forever', an image which refers back to personifications of death as a swallower of insatiable appetite (Num 16:32; Prov 1:12; Hab 2:5). The aim of the prophet is to cast the conflict of the Ugaritic myth into teleological perspective so as to stress the willingness of God to fulfil his purposes. In the Song the use of mythological imagery is rather different, namely to disclose the power of love as a primordial force capable of overcoming death.

⁷³ The god Rešep may be alluded to in the phrase רֶשֶׁפִּי הָרֶשֶׁפִּי אֲשֶׁר in the same way as I have argued Nahar and Yam are secondary allusions in 8:6. In Ps 76:4 קֶשֶׁת רֶשֶׁפִּי refer to the fiery arrows which God destroys. Here, shafts of fire are a metaphor for the power of love. As already suggested in the section devoted to Regal Imagery, images of war are frequently associated with love in the ancient world. Pope (1977, 670) cites the example of cupid with his arrows.

Certain aspects of the Song have encouraged critics to compare it to the Pastoral poetry of the Greek bucolic poets and particularly to that of Theocritus (284-275 BC).⁷⁴ The presence of parallel images and of parallel forms and above all the way in which the countryside is pervaded by courtly imagery have all been noted.⁷⁵ There are however important divergences which prevent the identification of the Song with the genre.

First of all, whereas for the classical poets, a pastoral scene provides the setting for a love-song sung by a shepherd-poet, in the Song there is neither consistency of context nor of character. Pastoral images take their place among a range of images alluding to different settings, none of which is wholly idealised. The shepherd of the Song is neither the narrator nor a principal character⁷⁶ but

⁷⁴ Ryken (1974, 234-235), Landy (1983, 26-32, 174), Fisch (1988, 80-81)

⁷⁵ Fisch (1988, 80-81) shows that the imagery of 1:9 is comparable to that of Theocritus' eighteenth idyll (Idyll 18, 31-31). He also compares the imagery of 2:15 to that of his fifth idyll (Idyll 5, 113-114).

Ryken (1974, 234-235) argues that the well-established forms of pastoral literature are evident in the Song. They are the invitation to love (2:10-15; 7:10-13), declarations in praise of the beloved's beauty (2:1-3a; 4:1-5, 12-15; 5:12-13; 7:1-9) and descriptions of the delights of love, using rural images and metaphors (1:14, 16-17; 2:36, 16; 4:16; 5:1; 6:2-3).

Ryken (1974, 221), Landy (1983, 26-27) and Fisch (1988, 80) all agree that the integration of courtly imagery into a pastoral setting is characteristic of pastoral literature.

⁷⁶ In Theocritus' first idyll, Thyrsis, a shepherd-poet sings of a shepherd-lover. In his third idyll, 'The Serenade', a goat-herd serenades his mistress, Amaryllis. In his fifth idyll, 'The Goatherd and the Shepherd', these two main characters vie

rather one of the guises in which the lover (1:7; 2:16; 6:2) or even the beloved (1:8) appears.

The pastoral moreover is characterised by a lighthearted playfulness appropriate to an afternoon's entertainment.⁷⁷ In the Song however, love is a matter of great urgency, and the longing of the lovers for each other, a consuming fire (8:6).

Their love is at once secure and under threat, menaced by little foxes (2:15), lions and leopards (4:8), the counterparts in the natural world, of the city watchmen (5:7) and the beloved's brothers (1:6) who seek to do her harm. Moreover, whereas the death of the shepherd is a traditional subject in the classical Pastoral,⁷⁸ death is set against love in the Song, as contradictory to and in opposition to life (8:6).

with each other to sing the best song. In each of these, as in many of the idylls of Theocritus, the shepherd-poet sings of love, either as it affects him or as it affects others. In the Song by contrast, the reader is plunged into a love affair as experienced first hand by an anonymous woman. In contrast to the predominantly male perspective of Theocritus's idylls the Song is sung principally from the beloved's point of view. She has many roles as 'beloved'; she is alternatively a shepherdess (1:8), a 'keeper of vineyards' (1:6) and a woman of noble birth (7:2).

⁷⁷ The introduction to Theocritus's sixth idyll demonstrates the lighthearted tone of many of the idylls;

'Damoetas and Goat-herd Daphis, Aratus ... had driven each his herd together to a single spot at noon of a summer's day, and sitting them down side by side at a water-spring began to sing, ...'

Theocritus, Idyll 6, 3-4 Edmonds (1912, 85)

⁷⁸ The motif is found in Theocritus's first idyll Thyrsis, for example, where an ideal shepherd pines and dies for love of a woman he may not court.

The pastoral imagery in the Song has also elicited the interest of proponents of the cultic theory. Kramer (1969) has drawn attention to the Sumerian Sacred Marriage songs in which the shepherd-king Dumuzi marries his sister Inanna in order to procure fertility for the land and good fortune for its inhabitants. Pope (1977, 334-5) cites the lines of one of these songs in which Inanna's presence is to "bless the stall". He reminds us that Dumuzi too, the shepherd-king, is frequently associated with the sheepfold and that he encourages his "sister" to observe the copulation of his sheep as a prelude to their own lovemaking. Pope implies that the relevance of these passages to the pastoral images in the Song is clear. On the contrary however it is very unclear, for nowhere is there the suggestion in the Song that pastoral imagery has anything to do with fertility rites. Fertility is not the issue. Rather it is love.

With these cursory remarks, we should turn to the pastoral images themselves and first of all to 1:7-8 where the imagery is present most clearly and consistently. For the first and only time, the lovers are set in a bucolic setting and take an active role in the activity associated with it, namely shepherding. These verses alone, however, are not enough to suggest that the three main characters in the Song are a shepherd, a shepherdess and Solomon, as proponents of the dramatic theory are tempted to do (Ginsburg, Renan).

The beloved's request is for a *rendez-vous*, for a moment's rest and repose with her loved one in the middle of the day, for even as she enjoys his presence, either actual or imagined, she is aware that the solitary duties of shepherding to which they must both attend, will, for a time, separate them. Her question

therefore, which is simple and direct, is full of longing; it is all the more so given the duplication of the interrogative אָוָּוְהָ , 'where', and the multiplicity of long open vowels which characterise the first and second colons (1:7). There is also the lengthy form of address, "you whom my soul loves" which is unique to the Song. It adds to longing a hint of melancholy; not only does she want to find out where he is, but perhaps even more urgently, she wants to communicate to him how much she misses him. She has barely given him the time to reply when, in 1:7, longing gives way to angry frustration. She suddenly accuses him of indifference or even callousness towards her, depending on the force of the participle אָוָּוְהָ to be examined in due course.

His response is equally direct. He issues specific instructions yet his meaning is far from clear. It all depends on whether it is his sheep she is directed to follow and whether she is capable of discerning the tracks of his sheep from those of the others. More importantly, it depends on his tone of voice and the intention of his words, whether his instructions constitute a straightforward assurance of his love for her (if he is where he commands her to go) or the teasing rebuff she most fears (if he sends her in search of him in vain). She will either be greeted by her loved one who awaits her or she will be shamed by him and made to look like a vagabond or even a prostitute if he does not appear. Indeed the possibilities are yet more subtle, for if he is where he directs her to go, namely by the shepherds' tents, there is no guarantee that his friends will not be there also. The decision as to whether he will acknowledge her as his beloved before his friends is also undisclosed. The beloved may equally be received or

rejected by her lover. Love makes her vulnerable, ready for commitment but open also to betrayal.

The ambivalence of the passage however may only exist for the reader, for he is unaware of the extent of communication between the lovers. It may be perfectly obvious to the beloved what her lover means. It is perhaps only we, the readers, who are in the dark.

Some critics question the identity of the speaker in 1:8. Landy (1988, 170) and Fox (1987, 103) agree that the speaker is the lover. Gordis (1974, 80) suggests that it is his companions that reply. If so, then the beloved has cause for anxiety for the response of his male companions underlines her lover's absence.

None of these questions can be answered, yet perhaps they do not matter too much. The meaning of the dialogue is to be found not so much in the words themselves as in the speech of the lovers who woo each other by the sheer sound of each other's voice. Thus, as Landy (1983, 175) points out, whereas the dialogue at one level reveals anger, fear and evasiveness, at the level of structure and sound it discloses a most profound unity.

The verses are indeed perfectly balanced. The beloved's question in 1:7a is countered by his response in 1:8a. Both are expressed as impersonal constructions. The lengthy term of address, "you whom my soul loves" (1:7b) is balanced by an equally lengthy term of address, "fairest among women" (1:8b) in the same position in the next verse. Her twin questions (1:7c-d) each begun by

the question "where?" find an answer in the two imperatives he issues in 1:8c-d. In both verses, the final colon seals the enigma (1:7e,8e).

In addition to the harmonious form of the verses is the alliterative unity created by sounds which echo each other throughout the dialogue. We have already noted the assonance of 1:7ab and the effect of long open vowels in the creation of an atmosphere of longing. We should also note the alliteration of ך, ך, ץ in ׁצוהרי ץ תרבי (1:7c) and the way in which the crispness of these letters helps to evoke the sun's fierce heat. His words too are characterised by alliteration and assonance. In particular we should note the kinship of ךץ - ךץ (1:8b) and ׁמרעי - ׁרעי (1:8de).

The effect of the density of similar sounds in a perfectly balanced construction is to wean us away from a search for meaning which is independent from sensory experience and sound. The lovers speak to each other in a language that only lovers understand, in riddles, in communication which has become play. Through sound and form they have found a way of giving voice to their love. It is, in some sense, a speaking in tongues.

The pastoral milieu, now that it has established itself, does not surprise us when it reappears. It does so in two very similar passages, 4:1-2 and 6:5-6. In neither is the pastoral imagery ostensibly the object of interest. In both cases the imagery is descriptive of the beloved's beauty although it is developed to such a degree as to take on a life of its own.

In both passages the beloved's hair is likened to a flock of goats moving down the slopes of Gilead (4:1; 6:5). The image is full of movement. Anyone who has watched goats on a hillside will recall their number, their sure-footedness and their speed. The image therefore successfully describes her head of tumultuous curls.

The descent of the goats is balanced by the ascent of the ewes and their young from the water (4:2; 6:6), an image from the same milieu, chosen to express the whiteness and perfect formation of her teeth.

The movement of the flocks up and down the hillside creates a pleasing harmony appropriate to the descriptive song. It also helps to anchor the lovers in the external world which is imbued with their presence. The fact that this imagery appears twice, almost without distinction, creates the impression of the semi-permanence of the pastoral background. This is only an impression however, for all the imagery in the Song is shifting and temporary, forever subordinate to the primacy of the lovers and their love.

There is one last aspect of the pastoral theme to consider. The poet takes advantage of the fact that the verb *לכל*, to feed, can be used both transitively in the sense of pasturing one's flock, and intransitively meaning to eat. This flexibility lends a certain suggestiveness to his language; the male protagonist is both a shepherd who grazes his flock and an eager lover who feeds on his beloved. Once the language of eating and drinking has established itself as an image of lovemaking, the intransitive sense of the verb *לכל* presses ever more

closely to the surface. It is sometimes even present when the verb is used primarily in a transitive sense.

The verb first appears in 1:7 in the beloved's question to her loved one, "Where do you graze?". The object "flock" is understood. The Hebrew however is deliberately terse. It leaves it up to the hearer to constitute the scene. Indeed one might envisage it differently on a second reading of the Song.

Of greater ambiguity is the statement in 2:16, "he grazes among the water-lilies". All depending on whether the participle *הֹרֵעַ* is used here transitively or intransitively and whether the flowers indicate what is eaten or the place of feeding, the phrase could mean that the lover feeds on the flowers, that he feeds on something else among the flowers or that he pastures his flock among the flowers.

Each of these options describe his delight in the beloved in a slightly different way. In the first, the flowers on which he feeds are a metaphor for the beloved. By implication, the young lover appears in the guise of an animal who feeds on them. According to the second reading it is she, the beloved, that her lover finds among the water-lilies as he grazes his flock there. The third possibility is that the phrase is a straightforward metaphor for the delight he takes in his beloved; he rejoices in her as a flock among tender water-lilies. The fourth and final possibility is that the phrase does not refer to the beloved specifically at all. It is simply an evocation of bucolic delight in accordance with the general atmosphere.

Only the last interpretation, which is also the most literal, would seem to be unlikely. Indeed the reason why we look for other, metaphorical readings is because the intention of the phrase is clearly to explain the preceding sentence (2:16). In other words it is to specify in what way the lovers belong to each other.

The phrase may refer specifically to their kisses, for her lips are compared to water-lilies in 5:13. Alternatively the reference is to lovemaking more generally, the water-lilies being one of the flowers of her garden to which she invites him to come and eat (4:16). The image is at any rate one of great delicacy and refinement. The lover pastures not on rough pastureland but on tender flowers. Though a shepherd, he has never ceased to be a king.

The mirror of this passage is 6:2-3. Here the declaration of mutual belonging (6:3) interrupts a series of images in which the language of pasturing joins the image of the garden to express the lovers' joy. It is indeed fitting that the image of the garden and pastoral imagery should find each other for, the water-lilies on which he feeds and which also describe his lips (5:13), grow nowhere better than in a carefully tended garden.

One further such image remains, that of 4:5 in which her breasts are compared to fawns, twins of a gazelle, feeding among the water-lilies. This image has been explored elsewhere in the section devoted to Sibling Relationships. Suffice therefore to say that it is an image of great delicacy and one which is evocative of rest and repose. This is especially so since gazelles are elsewhere associated with swiftness of movement (2:17; 8:14). Here at last they are at

peace. They feed on water-lilies, which is an indication of their good taste. The beloved's lover is similarly at peace at her breast. He feeds on her with infinite delight.

Three homophonic roots are fused in the verb לעל , the most common of which is the verb 'to feed' or 'to graze'. It is this root which has been considered at length. In addition however is the Aramaic verb לעל which has given the Hebrew לעל , meaning 'desire' or 'will'. There is also the Hebrew verb לעל , 'to associate with'. It gives the noun לעל , a 'companion' or 'attendant' and לעל , a female version of the same. The latter appears in the Song as the term of address most frequently used by the lover of his beloved (1:9,15; 2:1,10,13). She however uses the masculine form only once (5:16). Much more often she uses לעל with which לעל occurs in parallelism in 5:16. Indeed, that the feminine form of the noun is used so frequently in the Song is in itself unusual, for nowhere else does it appear in the Old Testament except perhaps in Jgs 11:37 in the ketiv reading. The Masoretes emended the form to לעל from לעל which is the form used in Ps 45:15 of the queen's maiden companions. The masculine plural of the noun לעל appears in 5:1 of the lover's companions. They are invited to eat and drink their fill.

Given the limited, yet constant presence of pastoral imagery, the poet could hardly have failed to intend the play on words evident in the Song. The young man is a shepherd (לעל) who grazes (לעל) among the water-lilies which are his beloved (לעל). Together they delight in each other as the source of each other's life.

Before embarking upon an analysis of the image of the garden, we should consider the tradition of garden-making in the Ancient Near East.

The Egyptians, whose life was centred around the fertilising waters of the Nile, were the first to develop the formal, geometrical garden. It grew around a complex system of canals and storage pools which provided the water essential for the irrigation of vines and fruit trees. To this basic arrangement were added figs and palms for shade, and flowers for decoration.

In contrast to the enclosed Egyptian garden is the royal park. This large, wooded hunting preserve was the innovation of the Assyrian kings. Tiglath Pileser I (ca. 1100 BC) furnished his park with cedars from abroad. Sennacherib (705-681 BC) brought to his preserve exotic spices, myrrh, cypresses, vines and fruit, all of which are present in the Song. Like the Egyptians, the Assyrians built, in these areas, small temples for cultic use and outdoor pavilions for royal feasts. The relief at Nineveh (Keel 1986, 87 fig. 38) shows King Assurbanipal enjoying a splendid meal out of doors with his wife.

With the expansion of the Persian Empire and the conquest of Egypt in 525 BC, the Persians conceived of a garden, which combined these two traditions, that of the enclosed garden, and the royal park. The result was a *pairidaeza*, the Hebrew form of which, פַּרְדֵּיז, appears in the Song (4:13). Xenophon writes of King Cyrus concerning these gardens that, "In whatever countries the king resides

or wherever he travels, he is concerned that there be gardens, the so-called pleasure gardens filled with all the good and fine things that the earth wishes to bring forth."⁷⁹

Given that such a well-established tradition of garden-making existed in the Ancient Near East, and in view of the substantial influence of the Egyptians, Assyrians and Persians successively in Palestine, it is not surprising that there is evidence in the OT of an indigenous Hebrew garden tradition. We read of royal gardens (Esth 1:5; 7:7; 2 Kgs 25:4; Neh 3:15; Jer 39:4; 52:7), of garden pavilions therein (Esth 1:5; 7:7) and of garden tombs in which the patrons buried their dead (2 Kgs 21:18;26). There are also hints that certain Israelites participated in cultic practices carried out in gardens Isaiah strongly denounces them (Isa 66:17).

Pope (1977:210-229) has explored extensively the relationship between Canaanite mortuary rites, the garden and the language of love. He suggests that the Song belongs to a love feast in a garden tomb, executed ritually, in defiance of death. Such an interpretation however, depends solely on a secondary function of the garden, namely that of providing a place of burial. It forgets that the garden was primarily a place of pleasure and of relaxation.

The spices and trees which grow in the garden of the Song (4:12-5:1) evoke the splendour of the ancient Assyrian royal gardens. Both Tiglath Pileser I, Sennacherib and Cyrus took great pride in planting in their gardens exotic species

⁷⁹ Xenophon, *The Oeconomicus*, translated by Carnes Lord, from Xenophon's Socratic Discourse (Strauss 1970, 19-22).

gained in their forays abroad. Moreover, the booth or wine house, to which the lover takes his beloved in 2:4, reminds us of the marquee in Queen Esther's garden or more distantly of King Assurbanipal's banquet out of doors. For both of these reasons the motif is clearly not a funerary but a courtly one. At the very least, it belongs to a milieu of opulence such as that described in Eccles 2:5. It is also an important bridge between the courtly and natural world, for in the garden, nature is harnessed, civilised.

Gardens - like islands - exercise upon the imagination a marvellous fascination. It is all the more potent an image in the Ancient Near East where, over against the dryness of the desert, the garden, watered by streams and teeming with vegetation, is a symbol of life and hope. Indeed the garden is a symbol of paradise for the three great religions of the Middle East - Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Characteristics of the garden are evident in the eulogy of Dilmun, in the Myth of Enki and Ninhursag. Dilmun is a divine paradise to which humanity has no access, that is, except for Ziusudra, the Sumerian Noah, who was exceptionally admitted there by Enlil (ANET 1969, 44, ll. 252-261). Even although it is reserved for the gods alone, it nevertheless expresses the deepest aspirations of mankind, for it is a place of eternal youth from which sickness, conflict and death are excluded (1969, 38, ll. 1-30). Although it is not described as a garden explicitly, but rather as a 'land' (ANET 1969, 38, l. 1) or as a 'city' (ANET 1969, 38, l. 30) characteristics of the garden do pertain, in the water which enables farms and fields to appear (ANET 1969, 39, ll. 31-64), in the presence of a

'gardener' who bears cucumbers, apples and grapes to the god Euki (ANET 1969, 39-40, ll. 153-167) and in the proliferation of plants following the impregnation of Ninhursag by Enki (ANET 1969, 40, 186-195).

Another Sumerian text speaks of a divine paradise at Eridu,⁸⁰ at the mouth of two rivers. In its midst grows a mysterious tree, its roots sunk deep in the fertilising waters. Again the image of the garden is not explicitly mentioned. It may be argued however that a garden is the earthly model for the divine paradise, since only an oasis or a garden with its irrigation canals and pools could sustain such life as this. Indeed oases are themselves organised by irrigation systems which make them a metaphorical 'garden'. Jericho is an extremely ancient example. Moreover the title of 'gardener' was given to King Sargon at his birth (ANET 1969, 119, l. 11). He was appointed as the 'gardener' of the god Akki. The mythological background of the text is hinted at by the appearance of the goddess Ishtar who falls in love with the gardener-king (ANET 1969, 119, 1.12). In the Gilgamesh Epic her love for Išullanu is alluded to (ANET 1969, 84, l. 64). He too is described as a 'gardener'.

The image of the garden therefore has a long history in the mythical imagination of semitic peoples. From the beginning it is associated with the paradisiacal realm of the gods. Closely related to the theme of the paradisiacal garden is the 'land of the living' of the Sumerian Gilgamesh Epic (ANET 1969,

⁸⁰ The text is cited by Widengren (1951, 5-6). He identifies it as CT XVI Pl. 46:183-47:198 taken from R.C. Thompson, *The Devils and Evil Spirits of Babylonia*, Translated from the Original Cuneiform Text with Transliterations, Vocabulary, Notes etc, London 1903-4, 200.

48-50). It is a land far off and inaccessible, zealously guarded by the monster Huwawa. Gilgamesh, in search of immortality, sets out to fell its cedars, the symbolic counterpart of the plant of life wrested from him in the Akkadian story (ANET 1969, 96, ll. 288-9). The enterprise however fails, for although Gilgamesh and his companion penetrate the forest and slay the monster, still the god Enlil denies him eternal life (ANET 1969, 50, ll. 32-34).

In the OT the ancient idea of a paradisiacal garden of the gods has not been lost. Two passages in particular, Ezek 28 and 31 recall the ancient motif.

In Ezek 28 the 'garden of the lord', the garden of Eden is situated on 'God's holy mountain' (Ezek 28:14).⁸¹ It was inhabited by the pharaoh of Egypt who was expelled on account of his over-weening pride (Ezek 28:17).

In Ezek 31, 'the garden of God' (Ezek 31:8,9,16) is associated not only with Eden (Ezek 31:9) but also with Lebanon (Ezek 31:16) and with a prodigiously tall cedar (Ezek 31:3) which was destroyed also on account of its pride (Ezek 31:10-11).

As Gibson (1981, 106) suggests, the allusion is probably to an ancient story about the home of the gods and about how, once upon a time, a rebellious angel was expelled for challenging the father of the gods, El. In both passages the

⁸¹ As Wyatt (1986, 426) has pointed out, the mountain, like the garden, functions as an omphalos motif. These are not different locations but different accounts of the same theme.

rebellious angel has been historicised so as to be identified with the pharaoh of Egypt (Ezek 31:19) or the king of Tyre (Ezek 28:9). Stolz (1972, 141-156) goes further. He relates the motif of the cedar tree to the Gilgamesh Epic, to the search for immortality and the motif of the tree of life.

The garden of Eden, described by the priestly writer in Gen 2-3, is no longer a garden of the gods but a garden created by God for man. The mythological inheritance of the story is everywhere evident - in the discreet presence of the tree of life (Gen 2:9) and in the serpent (Gen 3:1,4,13,14), both of which recall the Gilgamesh story - yet it is no longer a tragic story about man's search for immortality and his failure to procure it. It is rather a story about a call issued to man by God, man's failure to obey the divine command and the loss of innocence which resulted from it. Rather than about life and death, it is about knowledge and responsibility; it tells how man, by overstepping the limits of human existence, brought upon himself all the cares which accompany the power and independence of God. Henceforth, we are all beyond the garden, longing for our return. The image is used by the prophets, of the return of the exiles (Isa 51:3; 58:11; Jer 31:12). It is no less potent a symbol for us, evocative of all our nostalgia for perfect peace.

The garden of the Song and the garden of Eden resemble each other in many ways, even though they are different in genre; the one is narrative, the other poetry.⁸² The story in Genesis explores the disparity between man's potential

⁸² Comparative studies have already been undertaken by Tribble (1978, 144-165) and Landy (1983, 183-268).

and his actual state. It locates the responsibility for such a situation in an act of disobedience which ruptured man's harmonious relationship with his Creator and the world around him. It is a story which seeks to explain why human life is riven with pain and suffering.

If the story about the garden of Eden is a story about dislocation and exile, and if it asks questions for which there is no easy answer, the Song simply sings of love, and in so doing, initiates a process of restoration and return. It is not that the world is repaired and that suffering ceases to exist - the element of menace is too powerfully present in the Song for that - but simply that love transforms all things. Barriers, in the eyes of love, are thresholds, and divisions, distinctions. The garden, which in the Genesis story becomes an inaccessible place from which humanity is exiled, in the Song is rediscovered in the person of the beloved; it is in union or communion with her that her lover rediscovers the bliss of which the Eden story spoke. As a result, the world around is also recreated; it too becomes a garden, a garden of love which the reader too may enter for a spell.

The garden of the Song is however, like the garden of Eden, infinitely discreet. It appears first, in 4:12a, as an image of the beloved. She is, however, simultaneously described as a sealed spring (4:12b). The question is therefore, whether she is the garden or the life within it? The suggestion is that she is both.

The same ambivalence is present in the location of the garden. At first, the reader supposes that it grows around the spring (4:12). Then, in 4:15, he

wonders if the spring rises elsewhere. Perhaps in Lebanon? Moreover the garden and the spring have, by this stage, altered considerably; no longer is it a question of a single enclosed garden, but of a multiplicity of gardens growing around a well of rushing waters (4:15).⁸³

The relationship between Lebanon and the garden is a further source of ambiguity. The beloved, who is summoned from the heights, in 4:8, and whose clothes still resonate with its scent, in 4:11, is identified with Lebanon in 4:15. The garden, which would seem to be the opposite of Lebanon in terms of safety and seclusion, is paradoxically brought into some undefined relationship with it.

The result of the unsteadiness of the poet's gaze is to convey something of the lively mystery of her person; she is like a sealed spring (4:12b), she is chaste, yet she is also like a well of living water (4:15a) whose influence spreads far beyond her. This liveliness can also be described in terms of the freedom of the mountain streams rushing down the slopes of Lebanon (4:15b), or in terms of the abundance of an exotic garden, filled with every kind of tree and fruit (4:13-14). The beloved is, to the lover, each and all of these things; it is this extraordinary ensemble which bewilders and enchants him. Yet more significant is the erotic dimension lent to this sequence by the organising image of the garden. It describes, with great delicacy, how she progressively opens herself to her lover and invites him to delight in her. It is to this movement that we now turn.

⁸³ As argued in the section on *Water*, Murphy (1990, 157) suggests that the expression *בְּגַדֵּי מַעְיָן* may be a plural of generalisation. To render by the singular 'a garden fountain' does however lessen the effect of proliferation which the passage in various ways emphasises.

After having addressed his beloved in the second person, in order to ask her to leave Lebanon and its attendant dangers (4:9), he continues to speak directly to her, describing the sweetness of her kisses and the sensuous scent of her garments (4:11). As their intimacy grows however, and likewise his respect for her, he begins to speak to her in the third person and to address her in this rather more detached manner (4:12f). He does so in order to emphasise her independence and, in particular, her virginity. Neither is to be wrested from her, yet his very reticence, conveyed by the seemingly decisive passive participles "locked" and "sealed", heightens the terrible tension in which he waits. They barely conceal his impatience for the garden to open and the fountain to flow.

Contributive also to this tension, is the echo of the first image גַּן עֵדֶן in the second colon (4:12b) and its close relationship to the second element in the pair גַּן עֵדֶן גַּן עֵדֶן , by means of assonance.⁸⁴ A further tension, subordinated by the LXX is the shift in the MT from גַּן to גַּל in 4:12b. This option disturbs neither the meaning nor the sound of the line; both ג and גַּל are already alliterative and a garden or pool are equally appropriate in the context. It is a question simply of emphasis.

Equally ambiguous is the meaning of גַּן עֵדֶן in 4:13, discussed in the Notes to the Text (1); the reference is either to vegetation, to the shoots of plants growing in the garden or to the canals which water them. The ambiguity of the term strengthens the parallelism between spring and garden and denies the

⁸⁴ Assonance is occasioned by the repetition of the vowels 'a', and 'u'.

complete identification of the beloved with either of them. A locked garden, or a fountain sealed, the image hints that she can barely contain the abundant life within her.

This life is presently bodied forth in an orchard of pomegranates and all choice fruits, in a garden of exotic trees and spices, which speak of her splendour, her strength, her beauty, her sweetness (4:13-15). Many of the components of this garden are already deeply embedded in the language of the Song. The tree (4:14) is a metaphor for her chivalrous lover (2:3a) and its fruit an image of his gift of himself to her (2:3c). The pomegranate (4:13) describes her rosy cheeks visible through her veil (4:3). Myrrh and frankincense (4:14) are associated with the royal procession through the wilderness (3:6), and henna and nard (4:13) with the intimacy of their embrace (1:12-14). Spices (4:14) characterise the mountains to which her lover departs at the close of the Song (8:14). They also are associated with the fragrance of the beloved (4:10) and with her kisses (8:2). To these familiar elements yet more are added - calamus, cinnamon, aloes and saffron (4:14). They add scent, taste and colour to an already luxuriant garden. In it, the beauty of the natural world is tended, ordered and civilised.

In the course of the description of the garden, the emphasis changes slightly, from an evocation of her virginal purity to the promise of life which she holds forth. Her lover continues to address her in the third person (4:15), yet it is clear that the distance between them is increasingly difficult to maintain; as soon as the closed garden (4:12c) and sealed fountain (4:12c) are brought into relationship with each other, the result is a fountain of gardens (4:15a), a well of

living waters (4:15b), that is to say, multiplicity, proliferation, all the vibrancy of new life. The beloved is no longer identifiable with a particular place, garden or spring. Rather, her life-giving presence gives birth to, and sustains, a multiplicity of gardens (4:15a) nourished by a water supply, arising from without and from within. Not only is the beloved the garden and the source within it, but she is also the life of the world beyond and the vigour of streams arising in Lebanon (4:15b).

Up until this point (4:15), the beloved herself has been silent; she has been the passive subject of her lover's praise. Even as she stirs however, she, by now almost a universal figure, calls upon the winds of the earth likewise to "awake" (4:16). This she does in order that the fragrance of the garden might 'stream forth', and in particular, reach her beloved whom she subsequently invites to come and eat (4:16).⁸⁵ The initiative she takes in issuing this command, constitutes the beginning of the opening of the garden; it is an invitation which is decisive yet infinitely discreet. It is also reminiscent, by contrast, of the garden of Eden story; the winds which converge upon the beloved, inviting her loved one to return to the garden, contrast with the four rivers that flow from Eden, disseminating its life in the world around (Gen 2:10-14). The waters of the Song similarly converge upon the beloved; she is the primordial spring in the garden (4:12) but she is also associated with the streams flowing into the garden from Lebanon (4:15).

⁸⁵ The verb used by the beloved is לָקַח, the same verb used by her lover in 4:15.

The garden, henceforth, becomes the place of freedom and of exchange. No longer is it an image of the beloved's carefully preserved independence, but of the gift of herself to her lover; no sooner than she has claimed the garden as her own (״ 4:16) than it is also his (״ 4:16).

He responds to her invitation with unhesitating decisiveness and with evident desire. The battery of active verbs, each in the first person singular (5:1), all betray his extreme eagerness to take possession of his garden and to lose himself in its plenitude. Indeed this impression is all the more forceful, given the lack of verbs in the preceding passage, and the pent-up energy implied by the two passive participles "locked" and "sealed" (4:12) which we have already been discussed. For all his haste however, he is nevertheless a child in her arms: he comes to her as to the source in Eden, as to the first garden where innocence, love and safety are joyfully restored.

This brings us to one of the great contrasts between the Song and the Genesis story; whereas, in the latter, woman is a secondary figure and the initiator of Adam's fall, in the Song, she represents the original garden and is the agent of his provisory return.⁸⁶ It is therefore significant that the image of the garden, developed over a number of verses (4:12-5:1), falls at the midpoint of the Song. The position of the image not only emphasises the predominance of the beloved, who throughout the Song plays the major part, but also echoes structurally the

⁸⁶ The intention of this remark is not to suggest the literary dependence of one text upon the other and so enter the question of dating. More important than the question of literary dependence is the way in which both authors use a common cultural motif, that of the garden, to different ends.

relationship of the beloved to the world beyond, in the eyes of her loved one; the natural world and the abundance of life visible there, is recreated in her, for she, to him, is the personification of its beauty.

The image of the garden reappears briefly in 6:2-3, following the experience of loss and tragedy on the part of the beloved. If she has been likened to a garden, and if she has given herself as one might open a secret garden to a specially trusted friend, the beloved is no less vulnerable to rejection and betrayal. It is particularly ironic therefore, that the garden which is an image of the profound communion of the lovers in 4:12-5:1, momentarily in 6:2, threatens to exclude the beloved from the care and attention of her loved one; when the daughters of Jerusalem ask her where he has gone, she replies that he has gone to his garden, the implication being that he has made himself inaccessible to her. The garden is no longer therefore a place of relationship but of solitude;

‘My beloved has gone down to his garden
to the beds of spices
to graze in the gardens
and to pick water-lilies.’

The tension is eased immediately however, with the joyful affirmation on the part of the beloved that "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine" (6:3), a declaration which reassures the reader that the garden of 6:2, is none other than the garden of the beloved which he has entered, and in which he discovers his delight. The exclusion is therefore not so much that of the beloved as that of the daughters of Jerusalem, to whom she replies from the intimacy of the garden

(6:2). If they now seek to help her (6:1), it is too late. She has found her beloved and, invisible and inaccessible to all around, she rejoices in being alone with him.

Even as the garden is, at least temporarily, a place in the external world to which the lover may go (6:2), so it is also a place of reverie for him. In 6:11 he goes down to the nut garden in the hope of seeing signs of Spring. Though unlike Eden, the garden is part of the world of season and change, it is nevertheless like Eden, a place apart, the garden of his heart which reveals to him the miraculous presence of love (6:2). The confusion at the level of language, discussed in the Notes to the Text (2) speaks evocatively of his surprise.

In the closing verses of the Song, the association of the garden with the beloved continues, though not in the same way as in 4:12-5:1. In 8:13 she is seen sitting in the gardens with a captive audience around her. Her lover is distanced from her spatially, and is freed to roam the mountains of spices which are his particular domain (cf. 2:17). She, the heroine of the Song, has the last word; not only does she dismiss her lover, but she instructs others, presumably in the art of love.

The use of the image of the garden is, by this stage, highly complex. It refers primarily to the setting in which the beloved and the young women find themselves, a garden-complex. On the basis of the private symbolism which grows between the lovers and which identifies the garden with the beloved, it is tempting to understand the many gardens of the garden-complex as an allusion

to her young friends. They come to her for wisdom and advice, for she has come to inhabit the place which symbolically represents her.



CHAPTER 5

IMAGES IN SPACE AND TIME

i TIME, TIMING AND TIMELESSNESS

The aim of this section is to explore the treatment of time in the Song and to consider the paradoxical relationship between a concern for timeliness and the atmosphere of timelessness which persists throughout.

The concern for right timing is most clearly seen in the lovers' anticipation of Spring, for the sensuous blossoming which characterises this season mirrors the awakening of love which they sense in themselves.

In 2:8 the beloved hears the voice of her lover as he bounds over the hills to seek her out. On arriving at her window he pleads with her to "arise" and "come away" on the grounds that Spring is making itself known not only in their own land (2:12c) but indeed throughout the whole earth (2:12a). The urgency of his appeal rests on two factors. Firstly, the seven colons of 2:11-13 depend on the single conjunction וְ which establishes a direct relationship between the time for love and the arrival of Spring. Secondly, these colons mirror the steady progress of the season, from the passing of the winter rains towards the end of January to the ripening of the figs in mid-June. The verb וַיִּשָּׁחַק (2:12b) and the noun זֶמַן (2:12b) also contribute to the sense of urgency for the verb וַיִּשָּׁחַק has the primary meaning "touch" or "reach" (used of time in Esth 3:1 and Neh 7:73) and the noun זֶמַן is commonly used of the right time for something eg. Jer 5:24, Deut 11:14,

Hos 2:11, Ps 1:3 and Prov 15:23. Onomatopoeia and alliteration enhance the breathless description: 2:13ab is characterised by the sounds ׀, ׀ and ׀׀׀ as is 2:12a by the sounds ׀ and ׀. The alliteration of ׀ and ׀ in 2:12a sustains the onomatopoeic quality of the initial noun ׀׀׀׀, for the freshness of these first spring flowers is conveyed not only by the double meaning of the root ׀׀׀, "sparkle" or "blossom", but also by the combination of letters which make it up, the quality of which is sharp and brittle, like the dazzling appearance of the tiny spring flowers themselves.

The beloved accepts her lover's invitation obliquely using the language with which he has so recently wooed her, that is the language of Spring. She does not refer to their relationship directly but by means of the first person plural suffix implicitly associates herself and her lover with the vineyards now in bloom (2:15). Her concern that the blossoming vines should not be spoilt is a tacit acknowledgement that the time is right. Indeed her appeal to catch the foxes which would damage the vineyards is full of anticipation.

If her lover quickly responds to the new growth with an invitation to his beloved to join him in the blossoming countryside in 2:10-15, in 6:11-12 he is rather more ponderous. He simply goes down to the nut orchard to see the Spring. There, love takes him by surprise. 6:12 is extremely obscure. Enough sense can be made of the first colon however to suggest that it refers to the power of love to overcome solitude and to transport the lover to his beloved's side.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ For a discussion of 6:12 see Notes to the Text (2).

A third passage, 7:12-13, draws on the theme and vocabulary of 2:11-13,15 and 6:11-12. Now it is the beloved who speaks. She addresses her lover directly and proposes that they leave together for the country. The first person plural form of the four verbs נָצַח , נִלְכֵּךְ , $\text{נִשְׁכַּח$, נִרְאָה stresses a new reciprocity on the part of the lovers - no longer is he required to coax her out of hiding (cf. 2:14) nor is she required to meditate upon an absent lover (cf. 6:11) but together they go out into the countryside to consummate their love. Moreover it is she who takes the initiative. Unlike 2:10-15 is the fact that Spring is not the catalyst for their meeting. Rather, signs of Spring are sought to ratify their already kindled desire for one another. In this 7:12 parallels 6:11, though in 6:11 the lover seems unaware of the significance of his actions.

Not only does the advent of Spring confirm that the time for love has come but it also provides the setting for the lovers' meeting. The description of Spring comes to a climax in the beloved's promise that it is "there" that she will give him her love (7:13e). No sooner has Spring been invoked and the promise made, than scented mandrakes and delicious fruits appear around their door (7:14). Images of Spring have yielded to images of late Summer and Autumn in anticipation of the union. The climactic nature of the beloved's statement is reinforced by the verb נִצַּח , for the fruits which deck their doorway are fruits which have been lain aside for the purpose.

Not only does Spring stimulate the lovers' longing for each other but the lovers themselves are characterised by the freshness of Spring; the beloved is compared to a Spring flower, perhaps a crocus or an asphodel in 2:1, and he is

a bundle of henna blossom in her arms in 1:14. Even more so, the lovers are characterised by the plenitude of the ripening season; she delights in eating his fruit, the fruit of the apricot tree (2:3), her cheeks are the halves of a pomegranate (4:5), she is an orchard of pomegranates and other delicious fruits (4:16), her navel is like a pile of wheat encircled by water-lilies (7:3), her breasts are like a bunch of dates (7:8) and like clusters of the vine, and her breath like the scent of apricots (7:9). She promises him spiced wine, the juice of her pomegranates (8:2) and he comes to her, 'his garden', to gather myrrh and spice (5:1). Spring growth celebrates the birth of love and anticipates its fulfilment. The world in Spring mirrors the lovers' happiness and stimulates their desire. Ripening fruits, on the other hand, are the invisible fruits of a love full-grown. They describe the plenitude each finds in the other and represent the gift which they are ready to make of themselves. Spring and Summer thus fuse and blend, for the life cycle of plants has become a metaphor of the fulfilment of natural instincts.

Timing continues to be important in the Song. We see it in the beloved's desire to know where her lover lies down at noon (1:7), in her desire to go out early into the vineyards (7:12), in the repetition not to awaken love before it is ready (3:5; 8:4) and in the episode beginning in 5:2 in which bad timing provokes a series of disastrous events. This apparent precision however masks an underlying ambiguity as regards time.⁸⁸ Consider, for example, the beloved's

⁸⁸ Not only is there ambiguity as regards time, but there is ambiguity also as regards space in so far as the command ׁוּׁ in 2:17 may mean 'return' or 'turn aside'. It may be that in 2:17 she is not asking him to flee (cf. 8:14) but to come to her. If the verb is interpreted thus then the 'mountains of Bether' become a symbol

dismissal of her lover in 2:17 and 8:14. Timing here is of the essence, yet we are unable to determine whether her lover is banished until sunset or sunrise. We do not know therefore whether the meeting takes place during the night or the day. The difficulty is in deciding whether the fleeing of the shadows refers to the shadows which were visible during the day and which disappear with the coming of nightfall or whether the phrase is a metaphor for the passing of night and the breaking of a new day. Shadows are used in the former sense in Ps.102:1 and in Ps.109:23 and in the latter in Jer.6:4. The reference to the breathing of the day does not help to resolve the dilemma. It could refer either to the cool of the evening after the heat of the day or to the cool of the morning before the heat rises. The main thing is that the lovers understand each other. It is perhaps only we who lack the vital piece of information.

The night search of 3:1-5 has caused similar confusion. The beloved recounts how night after night she lay in her bed, longing for her lover and how one night she decided to get up and go in search of him. The little sketch rapidly draws our attention to her tenderness and to her courage. Her love for him is such that she will risk all for him. Some (Budde, Delitzsch, Gordis) have thought that the story which unfolds does not correspond to actual experience. Rather, the fact that the story begins in the beloved's bed and continues with odd behaviour on her part, suggests that she may actually be recounting a dream. In a dream, anything is possible.

of herself.

The narrative of 5:2-6:3 has provoked similar discussion. Some have suggested that the opening words, "I slept, but my heart was awake" indicates that the words which follow belong to the realm of dream experience (Budde, Freehof, Gordis, Murphy). It is possible however that the phrase simply refers to the attentiveness of the beloved to her loved one even as she sleeps. Not wholly unconscious, she is ever ready for his coming. This is the opinion of Fox (1985, 123). He cites Eccles 2:23 as another example of such restlessness. The subject of that verse is the one who toils, "even at night his heart does not lie down".

Our uncertainty as to whether these passages belong to the realm of dreams or to that of waking reality betrays our uneasiness in the face of temporal and spatial sequences which begin abruptly and have indeterminate endings. That is why it is convenient for Freehof (1948-1949) to claim that the Song as a whole is a series of dream sequences. Read thus, the disorder which characterises the Song "makes sense" (Pope 1977, 511).

Even if one cannot tell whether the Song belongs to the dreamworld or to waking reality, it may certainly be described as dreamlike on account of the rapid shifts which are evident from one verse to another. These are inexplicable in terms of objective reality for they disrupt any storyline which might otherwise establish itself. Instead they create an emotional continuum, tracing the way in which joy is endlessly lost and restored in the perpetual search for the loved one. It is love's logic which they, in oneiric fashion, reveal. It is the movement described by Fox (1985, 225) as a 'meandering river' and by Cook, (quoted by Fox (1985, 225)), as a circle of 'seeking and finding'. In Cook's words;

‘From beginning to end the lovers go from seeking each other to finding each other. But this action does not move in a straight line from separation to union; it leaps in impulses of voiced desire, from anticipated joy to actualised joy and back again. Any speech may find itself anywhere on the circle of seeking and finding.’

Given this itinerary in which the same experiences are endlessly repeated, timelessness overwhelms but does not totally suppress time. A concern for time survives in the urgent longing of the lovers for each other. It is also evident in the timely declaration of love’s power (8:6), a declaration which falls at the end of the Song as a comment upon the birth and growth of love. Otherwise however, sequentiality is subordinate to psychological reality, to the tides of emotion described above. Moreover the ever shifting perspectives compel the reader to give up the task of distinguishing between the real and the imaginary, the actual and the hoped for, for it becomes apparent that the lovers are capable of experiencing past, present and future with equal intensity.

This was first noted in the section concerning the daughters of Jerusalem. There, it was argued that their presence helps makes past present. Sometimes too, private dialogue later appears to belong to past experience, as in 2:1-3, where dialogue between the lovers quickly takes on the character of a narrative (2:4).

It is equally possible however that what appears to be reported speech may in fact belong to the future, as for example in 2:8-15, when the beloved describes

the coming of her lover and his summons to her. It may be that this dialogue is not a memory but rather a fantasy.

For the most part however the lovers address each other directly. Indeed her lover strives to bring his beloved back to this immediacy whenever, as in 1:12-14, she begins to take the path of fantasy and to speak of him in the third person. His words are always direct. There are only a few occasions (2:2; 6:9-12) where he does not address her as 'you'. Even the beloved's fantasies and memories are occasioned by the desire for his presence however. The shifts which take place in the course of certain sequences are all directed to this end.

References to particular days and particular times fit into this general pattern. The description of Solomon's wedding (3:6-11), as already suggested, is a metaphor of the lover's delight in his noble bride. The little sister's betrothal day (8:8), by contrast, belongs not to an idealised past but to an imagined future. It at once hints at the perpetuity of love, which is already present in the next generation, and serves as a pretext pointing to the tension between choice and destiny. Neither event locates the Song in actual time or space. Both are subordinate to psychological reality, to the relationship which is the subject of the Song. The motif of the wedding or betrothal day serves an additional literary purpose in so far as it brings together two imaginative fields which have been important throughout, namely those of regality and family life.

Day and night succeed each other in the same manner that absence gives way to presence in the Song. In addition, they gather around them a series of

associations pertinent to the lovers and to their great love. Night is particularly associated with intimacy, for it is then that she goes out in search of him (3:1-5; 5:6) and that he comes to her door (5:2), his head "drenched with dew", his locks "with the damp of the night". The verb $\gamma' \gamma'$, literally to "spend the night" is used as a metaphor of the security he feels in her embrace (1:13) and in anticipation of their departure to the countryside (7:11). Night is also associated with the dream-world which the longing for such a meeting provokes. We have already discussed the problem as regards 3:1 and 5:2. If night is the time of greatest intimacy, it is however also the time of greatest vulnerability and of danger. It is the time when the beloved suffers at the hands of the night watchmen (5:7) and the time when Solomon's litter is most vulnerable to attack from the "terrors of the night" (3:8).⁸⁹

As regards the day, the early morning is associated with their anticipated encounter (7:12), whilst the harshness of the sun, and most especially the noon-day sun, accompanies social disapprobation. It is the scorching sun, causing her blackness which is the reason for the contemptuous stares of the daughters of Jerusalem (1:6). It is also the noon-day sun which engenders in the beloved both the hope that she may find her love (1:7) and the fear that she may fall into the hands of his shepherd companions instead (1:7de).

⁸⁹ Krauss (1936, 323-330) testifies to the belief that supernatural powers endangered newly-wed couples on their wedding night. He points to the story told in Tob 3:7ff about the woman who lost seven husbands to the demon Asmodeus before the marriage could be consummated. Though there is little information about such demons in the OT. Sources Orientales 8 (1971, 101-142) describes three demons known in Babylonia, each of which operates by night (cf. Apoc. Baruch 10:8; Mark 1:3; 5:2).

Most often however the Song is sung on the threshold of day and night, so rapid is the passage from one event to another. The ambiguous repetend, "Until the day breathes and the shadows flee" (2:17; 4: 6) contributes to a large extent to this sensation. It is significant that an abbreviated form of this motif marks the temporary conclusion of the Song (8:14). The image of the gazelle on the mountains is just enough to suggest that the ending is but a pause in the Song's movement.

One further aspect remains, namely the theme of awakening. It is most prominent in the adjuration 'Do not arouse or stir up love until it is ready' which appears three times altogether in the Song (2:7; 3:5; 8:4). If love is not to be aroused aforetime, so life-transforming a process is it, nevertheless the beloved, when her time comes, calls on the winds to awaken them (4:16). The same verb אָרָא is used here. Henceforth, she cannot sleep. Even as she rests at night, her heart is awake אָרָא . Her warning therefore is to be taken seriously, for love itself is an awakening. This is the implication of her presence at her lover's birth (8:5). No sooner had he entered the world than she awoke (אָרָא) him to love, for she has indeed loved him from the beginning.

In the course of this chapter three main issues arise. Firstly, there is the relationship between the lovers and their environment, and the instability of spatial relationships. Then, there is the association of the lovers with particular places. Thirdly, there is the use of space as a mirror of their desire for each other. Finally, topographical references will be considered.

Space, like time, is primarily psychological, for the lover's perception of their environment is always determined by their love and longing for each other. The countryside, its vineyards and open hills is often used as a foil onto which the lovers project their feelings, yet it never has any autonomy apart from the lovers preoccupation with each other. In contrast to the objectivity of the Psalmist in his description of nature,⁹⁰ in the Song this external world is drawn into the subjectivity of the lovers so as to be the mirror of their emotional life; signs of Spring become signals for the fulfilment of natural instincts and the blossoming vines and fruit trees reflect the delight the lovers discover in each other.

Throughout the Song scenes shift and fuse with oneiric ease, for the action is not located primarily in the diverse milieux of the Song but in the dialogue of the lovers and in their quest to praise and honour one another. City streets and intimate interiors, the open countryside and its vineyards and gardens, the spacious desert and the awesome distant hills are all called upon in order to

⁹⁰ cf. Lewis (1958)

illuminate, in different ways, something of this great love. Thus it is that one environment quickly gives way to another as is evident in the very first verses of the Song (1:2-8).

The Song begins with the evocation of a courtly scene (1:2-4). As the beloved turns from her lover to address the daughters of Jerusalem directly however (1:5-6), so the courtly scene which has been so lightly sketched is increasingly eclipsed. The king and his adoring female entourage, the wines and costly unguents, all of which contribute to the evocation of a courtly milieu, all cede to an exploration of family tensions focusing on the question of property and the role of the beloved in the upkeep of the family vineyards (1:5-6). In the course of these verses a movement away from the city takes place. A pastoral scene, corresponding to the outer limits of the civilised world is the term of this trend (1:7-8). In 1:9-11 however, courtly imagery returns when her lover compares his beloved to a 'mare of the chariotry of Pharaoh'. So it continues throughout the Song.

Double entendre introduces a note of ambiguity into the significance of certain places, particularly garden and vineyard, both of which are symbols of the lovers, and particularly the beloved.⁹¹ As regards the motif of the garden, the more this motif becomes part of the private symbolism of the lovers, the less

⁹¹ According to Wellek and Warren (1949, 193-4) an image which persistently recurs becomes a symbol. When it recurs in a poet's work it belongs to his 'private symbolism'. If the symbol is particularly potent it may pass into symbolical tradition. Very often private symbolism draws on the symbolical tradition of the past. This is true of the symbol of the garden in the Song.

overt the intended meaning. Whereas in 4:12 the beloved is directly compared to a garden by means of an extended metaphor, henceforth the allusion is much more discreet. A number of elements in 6:2-3 alert the reader to the possibility of *double entendre*. First of all the lover is said to descend to 'his garden', a phrase reminiscent of 4:16 in which the beloved invites him to come to 'his garden' and eat its 'luscious fruits'. The garden referred to in 4:16 is clearly herself. Secondly, the language of grazing among water-lilies is already associated with love-making, principally on account of the imagery of 4:5 in which her breasts are likened to suckling fawns feeding on water-lilies. Thirdly, the motif of gathering is used only once elsewhere, in connection with the lover's delight in his garden, the beloved (5:1). There, he 'gathers' myrrh and spice. Finally, the likening of the beloved not only to a single garden but to a multiplicity of gardens in 4:12-5:1 invites the reader to consider this same sudden proliferation to be an indication of the liveliness of the beloved also in 6:2c. No direct identification is ever explicitly made however, with the result that the symbolic nuances remain subliminal. Eros pervades the entire landscape which the lovers inhabit, just as it stimulates all their actions and guides their perceptions of each other.⁹² The lack of definition of symbolic meanings as regards certain places, encourages the permeation of the entire universe by an atmosphere of love.

Nowhere is the instability of setting more clearly evident than in the *wasfs* or descriptive songs (4:1-7; 5:10-16; 6:4-10; 7:2-10a), for in these songs it is the

⁹² Fox (1985, 229) warns against identifying particular sexual acts in the Song. He rightly emphasises that Eros extends over the entire body and affects their perception of the world around.

body of the loved one that is the point of coherence of a number of diverse settings and of a multiplicity of images. In the *wasf* of 4:1-7 for example, the slopes of Gilead and the valley below are mentioned in 4:1, whereas the scene is the tower of David, presumably in Jerusalem in 4:3. In 4:5 the setting is again the countryside, namely the shady pools where gazelles feed on delicious water-lilies. Interspersed are images drawn from a number of milieux - scarlet thread from the weaver's shuttle (4:3), pomegranates from the orchard (4:2) and shy doves (4:1) such as those found in the covert of the cliff (2:14). Each of these coheres in the self-contained idyllic world which comes into view whenever the lover contemplates his beloved. Indeed each member of her body in turn suggests another of its beauties.

It is characteristic of these descriptive songs that the images chosen to correspond to particular parts of the body are more memorable than the referents themselves on account of the originality⁹³ of the imagery and the extent to which the metaphors are elaborated.⁹⁴ This is another ruse by means of which the idyllic world which the lovers inhabit appears to be more stable than it is. Indeed there are occasions when the images used to describe the loved one do actually

⁹³ Originality is essential to metaphor for metaphor depends for its success on the juxtaposition of two different things which are alike in at least one respect. Once the metaphor becomes conventionalised and the shock effect has disappeared, then it may be declared 'dead'.

⁹⁴ In the *wasf* of 4:1-5 for example, the imagery which describes different parts of the body is more or less elaborate. The imagery which describes her teeth (4:2) extends over four colons, that which describes her neck (4:4) and breasts (4:5) over three colons and that which describes her lips (4:3a) and mouth (4:3b) extends over one single colon only. As regards the more highly developed metaphors, active verbs (4:1f,2b) or participles (4:4bc,5c) accompany them. The referent in each case is simply placed in a nominal clause.

take on a life of their own and seek to identify the lovers with the world they inhabit. In 7:8 for example, the lover compares the beloved to a palm tree on account of her formidable stature. Henceforth she actually becomes a palm tree which he endeavours to climb (7:9).

Not only is the world visible in the loved one but it is also touched, tasted, felt and heard, for if the charm of the loved one appeals to the senses, then sensuality also pervades the world by means of which they describe each other. The sense which dominates varies from image to image. In 4:1c-f for example, the image depends principally on vision in order to communicate the vivacity of the beloved's head of curls. In 4:5 on the other hand, in an image which also conveys the lover's longing to be near to his beloved's breasts, the senses of sight, touch and perhaps taste are called upon. The extended image of the garden (4:12-5:1) demonstrates most clearly the way in which the world is touched and tasted in the beloved. To her, her lover comes to feed - on myrrh, milk, wine and honey (5:1).

Another aspect of the highly subjective nature of the Song is the blurring of distinctions between absence and presence, dream and reality. As Ramon Lull so aptly said 'Whether Lover and Beloved are near or far is all one'⁹⁵. This ambiguity is evident in the very first verses (1:2-4). There, the poet teasingly introduces the motifs of absence and presence, longing and fulfilment which mark

⁹⁵ Quoted from Reinhold (1947, 261).

the Song. He does so by, among other things, omitting the rubrics necessary to set the verses in time and space.

In 1:2-4 one would be hard pressed to exactly define the situation. 1:2 begins with the beloved's longing for her lover whom she addresses first in the third (1:2) and then in the second person (1:2), a distinction which may convey a shift from absence to presence or which may simply be an example of the stylistic technique known as enallage which is fairly common in poetry (cf. Deut 32:15; Isa 1:29; Jer 22:24; Mic 7:19). If the former is more accurate then the question remains as to whether he is actually present to her or whether her longing for him is sufficient to make it seem as if he is. What is actually the case there is no way of knowing.

She continues to praise her lover in 1:3, claiming that he is also loved by the ladies of the court. In 1:4 and 1:5, she oscillates between seeking his exclusive attention and joining with the other young women in his praise. There is in these verses a bewildering mixture of desiring to be his alone and seeking to highlight his uniqueness by enlisting others in his praise. It is impossible to judge whether he does actually accomplish what she hopes he will. The ambiguity is compounded by the verbal form וַיִּבְרֶךְ which may either be read as the second person masculine hiphil perfect with first person suffix 'he has drawn me' or more unusually as a precativ perfect 'Let him bring me'. Such distinctions are in the end useless for what the poet seeks to convey are two contradictory impulses on the part of the beloved, namely to delight in her lover in private and to show him off in public. More profoundly, what the ambiguity alerts the reader

to, is the paradoxical distinction between absence and presence. Though physically absent, her yearning for him is never satisfied. Time and space are indeed psychological; they mark the lovers' mutual love and longing.

This situation repeats itself on numerous occasions throughout the Song. In 2:8 for example, the beloved announces the arrival of her lover. The reported speech of 2:10 alerts the reader to the possibility that the episode is a memory relived. So strongly present is he to her however, that she responds to his call, first with a warning about the little foxes (2:15) and then with a joyous declaration of their mutual belonging (2:16). Finally in 2:17, she begs him to flee, a statement which suggests that at that moment he is present to her.

Throughout the thesis other instances of sudden shifts from absence to presence have been noted. There is the search for her lover in 5:6-7 and her request to the daughters of Jerusalem to help her in the task (5:8). When they respond (6:1) she replies (6:2) that she knows exactly where he is, using such language as to strongly suggest that she is already with him.

Finally there is the repetend, 'His left hand holds my head and his right hand is round me' (2:7; 8:4) which may either be read as indicative, as the fulfilment of longing, or as optative, as an expression of yearning for his presence.

The task of the reader is not to solve these ambiguities as if there were an actual situation or story-line to be discerned. Rather they highlight the interrelationship between absence and presence in the depth of love. Moreover

the ambiguity created by such shifts is most often in favour of the presence of the absent loved one, for hope anticipates the joy of their presence.

While spatial relationships are in a state of permanent flux, it is however possible to discern a pattern in the kinds of places with which each lover is associated. As already noted in the course of the thesis, the beloved is most often associated with images of enclosure or hiddenness. She it is whose lively eyes and ruddy cheeks are sheltered from the direct gaze of her lover by a veil (4:1,3; 6:7), she too it is who is likened to a shy dove hiding in the mountain-side (2:14) and who is borne in a litter that hides her from view (3:6-11). On three occasions she waits indoors for her lover (2:10-14; 3:1; 5:26) and on two occasions she wanders the streets of the city, itself a kind of prison (3:2-3; 5:7). There are also the images of the spring (4:12), the garden (4:12-5:1) and the vineyard (1:6; 8:11-12), each of which are symbolic of the beloved. Even her lover's embrace shelters (2:3) and enfolds her (2:6; 8:3).

Some of these images require further attention. First of all it should be remembered that the motif of the youth waiting at his beloved's door in 2:10-14 and 5:2b has a very long history. According to Jacobsen (1976, 35) the opening of the door of the bride's house was 'the central ceremony in a Sumerian wedding, which concluded the marriage and immediately preceded its consummation.' It is reflected in the courtship of Dumuzi and Inanna (ANET 1968, 639);

'Open the house, my queen, open the house'

It also appears in the Egyptian love-song tradition. There, the lover expresses disappointment at his beloved's rejection of him. Rather than an obstacle to the lover's meeting, (5:4-5) in the Egyptian love-song cited by Fox (1985, 75), the door is a sign of his beloved's indifference:

As for what she - (my) sister - did to me,
Should I keep silent to her?
She left me standing at the door of her house
while she went inside,
and did not say to me 'Welcome!'
but blocked her ears in my might.'

The motif appears for the first time in 2:10-14. The scene is beautifully wrought. The first two colons of 2:8 are extremely terse, conveying the suddenness of her lover's appearance;

כא הנה - זה קרי קרל

In addition, an exclamation opens each colon as first he is heard (2:8a) and then seen (2:8b). In order to stress the beloved's immediate recognition of her lover and her delight at his coming, the finite verb כרל is placed at the end of the line (2:8b) from whence it governs the two participle phrases which follow (2:8cd). These phrases have the effect of prolonging the dramatic tension because, in addition to the particular quality of the participle which is to convey continuing action, the phrases develop a single idea in terms of two images. Moreover, although the metre is the same (2+2) the length of the individual words is greater, reflecting rhythmically the large leaps the lover takes to travel over the

hills. The urgency of her lover is in deliberate tension with each of those instruments of prolongation.

The dramatic tension is heightened further by the pause in the movement constituted by the articulation of the simile which has been pressing beneath the surface. In 2:9ab it is expressed for the first time:

‘My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag.’

At this point too the metre broadens to the pattern 3+2, thereby slowing the *récit* down considerably.

The exclamation ‘Behold’ (2:9c) and the participle phrases which follow in 2:9c,e,f take the reader by surprise. Indeed the force of the participles is that she scarcely notices him arrive. The time taken to register his coming is longer than he needs, for he is already standing at her door, wooing her to come to his side (2:9).

The motif appears for a second time in 5:2, here at the heart of a mini-narrative. The *récit* begins with the beloved lying as before, in bed (cf. 3:1). Whereas in 3:1 however she could not settle but got up to seek her lover, in 5:2 she is already half asleep even though subconsciously she is attentive to his coming;

‘I slept, but my heart was awake’

From the beginning the reader is transported to the scene to experience the drama with the beloved. It is only progressively that it is hinted that the

action does in fact belong to the past and that she is no longer in the presence of her lover but rather that of the daughters of Jerusalem to whom she relates her tale (2:8). Initially however (5:2-3) the reader is plunged into the memory of his coming, an experience relived by the beloved with great immediacy. Several techniques are used to enable the reader to relive past events with her, notably the participles לֵבָשׁ , $\text{עָרַ$ and קָרַב (5:2), each of which make past, present. There is also the use of the direct speech by means of which lover addresses her directly (5:2c-f) and the use of internal monologue through which the reader enters her thought processes even as events unfold (5:3). In the failure of dialogue in these first verses (5:2-3) the seeds of the disaster to come are sown, for the tragedy of the little drama as a whole results from his haste and her hesitancy.

The scene is scarcely set (5:2a) when the action begins with the announcement of the arrival of her lover who, as in 2:9, is initially heard rather than seen (5:2b). As in 2:9 the noun קָרַב alerts the reader to his coming. Whereas in 2:9 however, his approach is described in detail thereby allowing time for her anticipation to grow and dramatic tension to mount, in 5:2 he arrives without any such warning. Indeed she has barely acknowledged his arrival (5:2b) when his urgent entreaty begins (5:2c);

‘Open to me,
my sister, my love,
my dove, my perfect one,
for my head is drenched with dew,
my locks with the damp of the night’

Even as he addresses her, she hesitates to open to him (5:3);

‘I had put off my robe,

how could I put it on again?

I had bathed my feet,

how could I dirty them?’

The effect of her delay is destructive beyond all her imaginings however, for her lover quickly grows impatient and attempts unsuccessfully to let himself in, thrusting his hand⁹⁶ into the keyhole in the absence of a key to unlock the door.⁹⁷ The gesture is a measure of his frustration.

There has been much discussion of 5:4. The phrase שָׁלַח יָדוֹ normally means ‘to stretch out the hand’ and is usually followed by the preposition אֶל or לְ (Fox 1985, 144). Here however the preposition בְּ is used as in Ps 144:7 and

⁹⁶ Pope (1977, 517-9) argues that the lover’s hand is a euphemism for the phallus and that the image is of coitus. He refers to Isa 57:8-10 where the term יָד is used twice in this sense and to the Ugaritic poem, ‘The Birth of the Beautiful Gods’ where El’s ‘hand’ is said to be ‘as long as the sea (KTU 1.23 i 34-35). Given that the context is the Sacred Marriage Rite (De Moor 1987, 117) the translation ‘phallus’ seems appropriate there. Lastly, the term is used in this sense in the Manual of Discipline at Qumran (1257:13) where a penalty is to be paid by the man who reveals his nakedness by putting out his ‘hand’ from beneath his clothing.

Even if יָד does have this meaning in certain contexts, this cannot be the primary meaning of the term in 5:4. The poet teases the reader with the suggestiveness of his language yet he is careful to avoid making direct references to coitus.

⁹⁷ The term בִּתְּחִילָה, literally ‘the hole’ does not make it clear what kind of aperture is involved. It may be a keyhole large enough for the hand (Pope 1977, 518) or it may be an opening through which the door may be opened from outside (Gordis 1974, 90).

Ezek 10:7. In these two passages it designates the withdrawal of the hand, suggesting that the phrase should also be translated in this sense in 5:4a. 5:4b would therefore convey her disappointment. As in Isa 16:11 where the same verb is used, it becomes part of a phrase which expresses pain.

Apart from Goulder (1986) and Gordis (1954) this interpretation has not received many adherents for it does violence to the dramatic development of the sequence. It does so by placing the emphasis solely upon the withdrawal of his hand which becomes tantamount to an announcement of his departure. Consequently, when she finally gets up to open the door (5:6), she already half expects him to be gone. The four colons of this verse which describe her decision to get up and to open the door to him are thereby made redundant, for the reader is warned aforetime of his change of heart.

A variation of this interpretation is the suggestion that the preposition γ/\square cryptically conveys the lover's change of mood as he puts his hand to the door and withdraws it again in a fit of peak, suddenly annoyed at her hesitancy which he interprets - rightly or wrongly - as teasing which has gone too far.

The advantage of this interpretation is the dramatic tension it creates, for the verse constitutes both the climax of his attempts to communicate with her (which began in 5:2) and the turning-point in his advances. Hence, when she responds in 5:5 it is with anxiety and desire. Both are kindled simultaneously as he puts his hand to the door and takes it away in the same movement.

Possible though this interpretation is, it does not however bring out the full impact of the failed meeting in the way that is possible if 5:4 is translated positively, 'My beloved thrust his hand in through the key-hole'. It is a translation which may be defended on a number of grounds.

The first case for this kind of translation was made by Delitzsch (1875) who, on the basis of 2:9 pointed out that the perspective of the speaker is all important. On both occasions the beloved is inside and relates how her lover sought to communicate with from outside; he peers in from the vantage point of her window and lattice (2:9) and seeks access to her chamber by means of the key-hole (5:4). Alternatively there is the argument of Pope (1977, 518) who, on the basis of Ugaritic usage, claims that the prepositions \beth and \beth/\aleph are interchangeable in Hebrew. Thus it is that many commentators (Fox, Murphy, Keel, Pope) translate the preposition \beth/\aleph by 'into' or 'through'.

This interpretation lends itself to the assumption that it is a question not so much of a lover's tiff but of the failure of the lovers to communicate in the same way. He seeks to communicate with her through word and action, first by knocking at her door (5:2b) and then by calling to her (5:2c-f). She, on the other hand, is unable to respond to him other than emotionally - with a wakeful heart (5:2a) and with the coy reserve that delays their meeting (5:3). The events which follow, his precipitate departure (5:6) and her search for him by night (5:6de) are therefore the direct result of the difference between them.

In the light of this irony 5:4 plays a major part, for his attempts to communicate with her culminate in his decision to turn away in spite of the fact that inside she is moved by unprecedented emotion for him. The Hebrew puts it much more strongly, 'My heart turned over'. The choice of the verb is surely deliberate. Unable to call to him directly or to open the door, her whole being nevertheless responds to him with inarticulate emotion. At this very moment he reckons his attempts to have failed.

The irony of these events is emphasised by the fact that by the time the beloved does finally get up to open the door to her lover, the drama has already moved definitively into the realm of past experience as is indicated by the consistent use of the perfect tense 'I arose', 'my hands dripped', 'I opened', 'my love had turned', 'I swooned' in verses 5:6-7. Events are no longer in her control even although she is, at last, the principal actor. Indeed from the moment he put his hand to the door (5:4) events move her inexorably towards her fate.

In 5:5 the beloved acts decisively for the first time, as is conveyed by the forceful personal pronoun *אני* which accompanies the first person singular perfect verb *קמתי*, 'I arose'. The word order of 5:5a is straightforward and uncomplicated, conveying the directness of her intentions. Her emotion is betrayed however immediately thereafter by her hands which drip with myrrh. The elaboration of this image over three colons (5:5b-d) gradually delays the opening of the door and conveys the anxious anticipation of the beloved for whom every moment of separation increases her longing. Indeed her movement to the

door is described wholly in emotional terms, in terms of myrrh which flows from her fingers as a sign of her love and longing:

‘I arose to open to my love
and my hands dripped with myrrh,
my fingers ran with liquid myrrh
upon the handle of the latch.
I opened to my love ...’

The climactic statement of 5:6a to which this elaborate emotional imagery leads, is remarkable for its directness. The simplicity of the statement, ‘I opened to my love’ (5:6a) draws attention to its vital importance. The questions she put to herself in 5:3 and the detailed description of her reaction to his calling in 5:4-5 have all delayed the immediate response he demanded in 5:2. The question now is whether the time taken by these reflections has exceeded the limits of his patience. The use of the verb פתח, ‘to open’ at each key moment in the drama - in his entreaty (5:2), at the moment of her decision (5:5) and now in her fulfilment of his request (5:6) - heightens the tension, for the distance in the narrative between the entreaty פתח (5:2c) and her response פתחתי (5:5a) makes the reader all too aware of the danger of her being too late.

Sadly, happenings in the psyche run according to the same pace as events in the narrative. There is no speeding up of the emotional life in order to keep abreast of the demands without. Hence in spite of the reader’s willingness to urge the beloved on, it is in fact too late. Her disappointment is expressed in few words (5:6b):

‘... but my love had turned and was gone’

The asyndetic construction עָבַר חַיָּתָא is strongly emphatic.

With his disappearance, her life has also ‘gone out’ (5:6c). There is nothing left at all to her save his departure.

The metaphor of 5:6c works in two ways. On the basis of Gen 35:18 the expression ‘my life went out’ seems to refer metaphorically to death. The beloved uses the image to proclaim her life void. She is not dead, but she seems to be, hence I have translated the phrase by ‘I swooned’.

Paradoxically however, the life that goes out of her, leaving her bewildered and demoralised, finds itself renewed in the search for her lover (5:6d-e). The image of death and devastation becomes temporarily an image of hope, inspiring her to get up and follow her lover wherever he is. The ensuing night search in the city (5:7) takes us beyond the motif of the beloved waiting indoors for her lover. It does however introduce the next topic, namely the relationship of the beloved to the city.

The beloved’s failure to make contact with her lover either by calling (5:6e) or seeking him (5:6d) is compounded by the fact that though unsought, the city guards find her (5:7). These faceless men, the ‘keepers of the walls’ (5:7e) reinforce the prison-like defenses of the place by circulating therein, imposing a harsh discipline upon strangers. Like the bedchamber, the city is an enclosed, protected place. It does not function in favour of lovers however but rather in

favour of society whose interests are sometimes quite different. It is not clear of what they accuse the beloved, whether of harlotry or of adultery, but their violence towards her, beating her, wounding her and tearing off her veil (5:7), leave her in no doubt that the flight of a single woman through the streets at night is not to be tolerated. The episode is reminiscent of the night flight of the woman in Prov 7:10 and of the warnings given to the young man to be careful to avoid those such as she (Prov 7:5ff). The watchmen in the Song presumably act on such advice as this without being able to tell who, or what, the beloved is. The Song however is not written from the perspective of their good intentions but from that of the beloved who protests against their violence.

5:7 is constructed in such a way as to emphasise her vulnerability and the violence of the régime. The verse opens with the announcement of her capture; rather than find her lover, she herself is found, מֵצְאוּנִי, literally, 'they found me'. Her captors are then named (5:7ab). Their lengthy title, 'the watchmen who go about in the city' testifies to their role which is surveillance and defence. The three verbs (הִכּוּנִי, פָּצְעוּנִי, [אֶת רִירִי] שָׁאוּ) which one after another describe their cruelty - 'they beat me', 'they wounded me', 'they stripped me of my mantle' - draw attention to the helplessness of the beloved, whilst the new title given to them, 'the keepers of the walls' (5:7e) gives authority to their actions.

The motif of the city is associated with the beloved also in 3:1-4. There, the tone is quite different.

As in 2:8-10 and 5:2-6 the beloved waits indoors for her lover. Indeed the plural כַּלִּילַי לַלַּיְלָה, literally 'in the nights' suggests that she has often lain in bed yearning for him (3:1). One night, the night described in the Song, she decides to go in search of him (3:2). Once begun, the search dominates the narrative. It does so by means of a number of key motifs combined in a rapid series of events. To this austere, yet densely repetitive sequence, every extraneous detail is sacrificed:

'Night after night on my bed

I sought my true love

I sought him but did not find him

I said, 'I will arise now and go the rounds of the city,

through the streets and squares,

seeking my true love.'

I sought him but could not find him.

The watchmen found me

as they made their rounds of the city.

"Have you seen my true love?"

Scarcely had I passed them

when I found my true love ...'

Here it is not elaborate imagery which conveys the beloved's longing. Rather it is the momentum of the narrative as it strains relentlessly onward towards the resolution of the search. Only once her lover has been found does the lyrical language reappear. The anticipation of bringing him home to her mother's house brings about this change (3:4):

'I held him, now I will not let him go
till I bring him to my mother's house,
to the chamber of her who conceived me.'

Though the rigorous demands of narrativity preclude any development of the relationship between the beloved and the nightwatchmen, on the basis of their encounter in 3:4, some comment may be made. Both parties rove the city independently, unaware of each other's presence until the watchmen happen to come across her in 3;4. Even then, they only pay attention to each other because they are both roaming the city which is usually deserted at night. The element of companionship which this affords is however cut short by their very different concerns, the watchmen with security, the beloved with love. As soon as she sees them, the beloved asks the watchmen if they have seen her lover. Their silence conveys either astonishment to the question or indifference to the answer. The beloved for her part, does not want for a reply, but passes on to be eventually reunited with her lover, leaving the dialogue with the watchmen unfinished. In this brief and unsatisfactory encounter, two worlds meet for an instant, only to part once more.

One further remark may be made as regards 3:1-4, namely the progressive narrowing of concentric circles as the beloved anticipates leaving the city streets (3:2) to bring her lover into the intimacy of her mothers house (3:4d) and bedchamber (3:4e). These motifs were discussed in the section on Motherhood.

In the course of the chapter it has been noted how very often the beloved is seen 'inside', inside city walls, behind windows or behind doors. It has also been demonstrated that garden and vineyard are not only enclosed, self-contained places where the lovers frequently go but that they also become symbolic of the beloved. The reader thereby becomes accustomed to associating her with stability and interiority and to observing her lover move to and from where she is. In the section on the Garden I argued for the centrality of the symbol as a means of access to paradise; the beloved is not only functionally⁹⁸ but symbolically at the heart of the Song.

Sometimes however, the beloved surprises the reader by being neither 'inside' spatially, nor at the centre in terms of narrative perspective. Occasionally she is seen moving on the margins of the world she dominates, observed by others who remark upon her movements (3:6; 8:5) or summoned by her lover who calls to her to come down from the distant heights of Senir and Hermon (4:8). The introduction of these motifs enables other qualities of the beloved, unexplored by image of hiddenness and enclosure, to come to view. Her awesome beauty (3:6) and tender strength (8:5) is disclosed in her emergence from the desert. Her almost mystical otherness is hinted at by her occupation of distant and dangerous mountain peaks (4:8). By reason of their infrequency these images are important.

⁹⁸ The beloved may be said to be functionally at the heart of it in so far as the entire poem is focused upon her. Whilst he is frequently absent (1:7-8; 3:1-3; 5:6-8; 6:1 etc.) she is always present and events are narrated from her viewpoint: sixty verses are spoken by her, forty-one verses are directed to her, eighty are spoken about her. Out of a total of one hundred and seventeen verses only eight are not related to her. It is therefore her Song through and through.

In 3:6 and 8:5 the beloved emerges in dazzling splendour, ascending without warning from an unspecified location in the wilderness. On both occasions her appearance in the desert follows a sequence which culminates in the anticipation of meeting in the intimacy of her mother's house (3:4; 8:2). In each case there is a striking contrast between the seclusion of her maternal home and the open expanses of the desert. The skill of the poet is to be able to use the austerity of the desert landscape in order to bring to light some aspect of the beloved which the landscape in Spring does not highlight, her awesome beauty in 3:6, her vulnerability in 8:2. She appears suddenly out of nowhere like a mirage in the desert wastes. On both occasions the strangeness of the vision provokes the rhetorical question, 'Who is this?' (3:6; 8:5).

As argued in the section on Regal Imagery, her emergence from the desert in 3:6 becomes part of a detailed description of the progress of Solomon's litter towards Jerusalem. At first however all that is visible is a shimmering form which emerges on the horizon 'like a column of smoke'. The exotic scents, the myrrh and frankincense which announce the arrival of this very special person are a metaphor for the clouds of dust thrown up by the approaching caravan. Seen from afar by an expectant lover, they are as a cloud of perfume. Remarkable in this verse is the way in which alliteration binds the imagery together; the sequence נ...נ is evident in every part whilst the similar sounding letters ק/כ alternate with each other in 3:6b-d. Furthermore כתי מרת in 3:6b and מקטרת in 3:6c are very similar in sound. There, the poet deliberately plays on the similarity between ק/כ and ט/ת .

In 8:5ab the beloved does not ascend from the desert alone but leans on her lover. Together they emerge from the desert, triumphing not by means of military might (cf. 3:7-8) but by mutual tenderness over the realm of chaos and death which, in Jer 4:23 is represented symbolically by the desert.

In both of these verses, in contrast to the lover who descends into his garden (6:2) or to his nut orchard (6:11), the beloved ascends from the desert. The destination of this ascent is, in 3:6-11, Jerusalem. In 8:5 it is not specified, although the use of the verb *אָלַע* is reminiscent of the pilgrim's ascent to Jerusalem, the holy city (Isa 2:3; Ps 24:3; 122:4). The ascent itself lends dignity to the beloved. The reference to Jerusalem directs the movement back to the redactorial centre of the Song, that is to the city where the beloved tells her confidantes, the daughters of Jerusalem, of the events of love.

The other milieu associated with the beloved is Lebanon and the northern peaks of Hermon and Amana (4:8). These are the highest peaks of Palestine; Lebanon rises to a height of 3,083m while Hermon, otherwise known as Senir (Deut 3:9) and Amana constitute the formidable peaks of anti-Lebanon. In 4:8 she inhabits these northern peaks, making her an attractive yet most formidable figure indeed. There she moves among lions and panthers in complete safety, mistress of the domain she inhabits and of all that there is therein.⁹⁹ Distant

⁹⁹ The formidable aspect of the ancient love goddess Ishtar was depicted in ancient iconography in a similar way. According to Keel (1986, 148) lions and panthers are often associated with her and she is often depicted enthroned upon mountains (Keel 1986, 148). Remembrance of the ancient goddess of love and war adds a menacing note to a dramatic backcloth.

and inaccessible, she holds sway over this awesome landscape, over the margins of the unknown until her lover calls her to be the garden of his delight (4:12ff). Even as he approaches his garden however, all the mysterious otherness of Lebanon is rediscovered there, in the scent of her clothes (4:11) and in the intoxicating effect she has on him as conveyed by the verbal form *לכבתי* (4:9), which closely resembles the place name *לכנן* (4:8). Moreover as the garden opens and the fountain flows, so the rushing mountain streams of these distant parts are also present in her (4:15), for her welcome to her lover embraces not only Lebanon but the entire universe. The fountain sealed which was the beloved (4:12) is now become the rushing waters of the wider world.

As Lebanon is discovered in the garden of the beloved so it loses any hint of menace and participates in a symbol of sheer delight. In this respect it regains something of the paradisaical association it enjoys elsewhere in the OT (Ezek 31:4,6).

Unlike the beloved who is most often associated with enclosed, hidden places and only exceptionally with desert and distant mountain range, her lover is most often associated with the freedom of the open spaces, with mountains and hills of relative proximity to his beloved's door (2:8). These are not the dangerous heights of Lebanon or Hermon in the north, where wild animals lie in wait, but the hills of Samaria and Judah, the secluded habitat of stag and gazelle. They are places such as Bethel (2:17), the modern Bittir, 17km from Jerusalem.

Even although her lover never moves too far from his beloved's door and even although she does keep a close check on his movements, parting for all that always creates distance, physical and psychological. Thus it is that his relatively accessible mountain refuge takes on the character of distant mountains, the places where exotic perfumes, myrrh and frankincense have their origin (4:6; 8:14).¹⁰⁰ This could be India or Persia via the spices routes of mediating Arabia. Alternately the image may simply refer to the equally distant mountains of the imagination - mountains belonging to the far off other world from which the lover visits her.

It must be remembered however that myrrh and frankincense are also associated with the beloved. Indeed in 4:6 it is perhaps to the beloved herself that the motif of the mountain of myrrh and hill of frankincense refers, for the lover's decision to take himself off there, immediately follows a description of her breasts with which the motif all too well accords (4:5,7a). It may then be that, far from leaving her, he vows to take refuge in her that night. Yet again the reader is astonished by the agility of the poet, by his capacity to raise a doubt in his mind even as he presses his interpretation in a particular direction.

The Song, as has been said many times before, is a perpetual search, a search that is completed only in the finding of the loved one and in the beginning of the search all over again. Each lover seeks his wholeness in the other, only to

¹⁰⁰ Indeed Rabin (1973, 205, 219) grounds the motifs of longing in the custom of young men to absent themselves for long periods at a time. The 'mountains of myrrh' to him are the hills of South Arabia to which the absent lover set off in a caravan.

discover that moments of deepest communion are filled with a longing and a yearning to love yet more. Thus it is that, as long as love lasts, the search continues. In Fox's (1985, 226) words, 'one "finding" is never enough'.

This ongoing search for communion, for oneness with the other, is expressed largely in spatial terms. It is disclosed in the movement between the two realms occupied by the lovers, inside and outside, and in the crossing of the threshold from one to the other. Seeking admission inside and being drawn outside are the two key movements which together define this desire. Predominant is the movement inside, for interior environments are associated with intimacy and a certain privacy. The beloved longs to take her lover to the privacy of her mother's house (3:4; 8:2), her lover draws her to his private chambers (1:4) and his wine house (2:4) and finally, it is to be admitted to the seclusion of her room, that he comes to her door in 5:1. The lovers also however long for the freedom of the countryside. He comes to her door to draw her out in 2:1 and she expresses the desire to go out into the country with him in 7:12.

The key motif in this dual movement, inside and outside, is the image of the garden, for the symbol comes to embrace both contradictory impulses; the lover comes to the beloved, his garden, to discover the world recreated in her. Henceforth he sees in the world around him, a garden filled with her presence. The motif of the vineyard and of Lebanon also participate in this *double entendre*, thereby disclosing the unity between the lovers and their world.

It was suggested in the section on the Garden that the crossing of the threshold to enter the garden constitutes the restoration of the unity and the communion of paradise. The Song does not end however with the lover's entry into the garden and his discovery of its delights. The sudden intrusion of 'friends' in 5:2 breaks their communion and obliges the search to begin again (5:3). The reader is thereby sharply reminded that this is not the original Eden, a realm of thresholds definitively crossed. It is rather our world, a world of ambiguity where distinctions are continually to be recognised and where freedom is forever to be gained. Eden, like Lebanon is marked by discord and by danger yet it continues to hold forth the hope of communion. It is in terms of spatial relationships that this longing is conveyed and the process begun.

In the preceding section I emphasised the role of the setting in pointing up the situation of the lovers and the way in which the Palestinian locale is internalised as a foil to their changing moods. The ancient setting is however never drowned out by being internalised. Indeed the psychologising treatment of particular places depends on close observation and knowledge of specific locations. It is for example, the ruggedness of the Lebanese mountains which make them an appropriate metaphor of her inaccessibility in 4:8. Topographical references are extremely important, for they contribute to the distinctively Hebrew character of the Song.

Most references to locality direct us to the north, to the hills of Senir, Hermon and Carmel, to the ancient capital of Tirzah and beyond to Lebanon in the far north. Alternatively, we find ourselves in Transjordan, in Gilead, in

Heshbon, the capital of Sihon, king of the Amorites or in Kedar, the territory of the war-like descendants of Ishmael. Only exceptionally is reference made to Judah. Ein-Gedi, by the shores of the Dead Sea and the village of Bether, 12 km from Jerusalem are its sole representatives. cursory mention is made of Egypt in 1:9 and of Syria in 7:4. Jerusalem is frequently mentioned, yet only once in its capacity as the holy city (3:10).

Biblical associations with these localities do frequently help in the interpretation of the Song. Ein-Gedi, for example, was both a refuge for royalty (1 Sam 24) and a well known garden of dates (2 Chron 20:2). Ein-Gedi is precisely a place of refuge for the lovers, a refuge which is also a garden of delight.

Biblical references to Kedar help us clarify the imagery of 1:5. There the beloved likens herself to the curtains of Solomon and the tents of Kedar. The former evokes the splendour of Solomon's court whilst the latter, the rude goat hair tents of the people of Kedar. These people, living in the desert of Transjordan, on the limits of the civilised world (Isa 42:10; Jer 2:10) were known to be wealthy on account of their livestock (Jer 49:27; Ezek 27:21; Isa 60) and war-like on account of their descent from Ishmael (Ps 120:57; Gen 16:12). The tribe was thus an unsettling neighbour for Israel and an appropriate image of the beloved's marginal position which she so adamantly defends (1:5). The antithetical parallelism of tents and curtains which successfully contrasts two quite different milieux is well known. It is evident in Jer 10:20, Hab 3:7 and Jer 49:28.

Gilead is mentioned in two identical images describing the hair of the beloved (4:1; 6:5):

Your hair is like a flock of goats
moving down the Mount Gilead

The flowing tresses of the beloved's hair are likened to lines of black goats as they wend their way down the mountain-side. It is the movement of her hair which the image seeks to convey. There is however a darker side to the image, namely a certain compelling attractiveness which emanates from her hair to captivate her loved one.

The story of Samson reveals that hair was considered to be a source of life and strength in ancient times (Judg 16:5). Wild men wore their hair loose (Ps 68:22) as did warriors, as a sign of their prowess (Judg 5:2). Indeed the image of the beloved's hair as bait which her lover cannot resist is a favourite theme of ancient Egyptian love songs:

...her hair is bait

in the trap to ensnare me

(Fox 1985, 19)

and again:

With her hair she lassoes me,

with her eye she pulls me in.

(Fox 1985, 73)

Gilead is an appropriate setting for such an image. It is a mountainous region, east of Jordan, a region which is thickly wooded and teeming with livestock (Mich 7:14; Jer 50:19). It is easy therefore to imagine how one could

associate such a region with a lively head of hair. Moreover it is an area on the frontiers of the known world (Isa 17:2; 32:14; Jer 6:3), a place whose distance from the centre accords well with the beloved's awesome allure.

Sometimes the choice of a particular setting is determined by the suggestiveness of its name. Thus it is that Tirzah, from the root תִּרְצַח, 'to take pleasure in', is coupled with Jerusalem, the city described as the perfection of beauty in Ps 50:2 and Lam 2:5. Both cities proclaim the beloved's proud beauty. The fact that they both served for a while as capital cities, Jerusalem in the south and Tirzah in the north, makes them highly suitable for the task. To the evocation of splendour, they bring connotations of royalty and strength and, on account of their location in the mountains, height. It is worth remembering that Heshbon too was a royal city, the capital of the Amorites. Each of these distinguished locations contributes to the grandeur of the beloved.

Of all the places mentioned in the Song, Lebanon is among the most frequently mentioned. It is mentioned six times in all, in a variety of different contexts. In 5:15 it is associated with the lover. His "appearance is like Lebanon, choice as the cedars", an image which draws on the reputed strength and grandeur of these Lebanese trees. These are the trees which display God's greatness in Ps 29:5 and Ps 104:16 and which were hewn by Solomon's servants in order to build the house of God in 1 Kg 5:6 and his own house in 1 Kg 7:23. These are also the cedars which form the solid framework of his litter in 3:9.

In 4:8,11 and 15, it is with the beloved that Lebanon is associated, first of all on account of its formidable height and inaccessibility in the distant north, secondly on account of the fragrance which emanates from there (Hos 14:5-7), and lastly on account of the freshness and vitality of its mountain streams. The beloved calls upon each of these aspects in turn; she is awesome as distant Lebanon (4:8), her clothes are pervaded by the suggestion of its exotic scents (4:11) and her youthful enthusiasm for her loved one's embrace finds its expression in its rushing streams.

Lebanon never occupies the foreground in the Song yet it is invoked throughout the Song in relation to both lovers as a symbol of stability, prosperity and romantic exoticism. The allusions of the Hebrew poets to a place of great natural beauty are never far from our mind. We recall the promise to the righteous that "they will grow like a cedar in Lebanon" (Ps 92:12) and the promise to Israel that "his fragrance shall be like Lebanon" (Hos 14:6). Indeed Hos 14:5-7 clearly demonstrates the paradisaical dimensions of the motif:

I will be as dew to Israel
he shall blossom as a lily
he shall strike root as the poplar
his roots shall spread out;
his beauty shall be like the olive
and his fragrance like Lebanon.
They shall return and dwell beneath
my shadow
they shall flourish as a garden,

they shall blossom as the vine,

their fragrance shall be like the wine of Lebanon.

Isaiah too (60:13), in his vision of the future glory of Zion, calls upon these same associations:

The glory of Lebanon shall come to you,

the cypress, the plane and the pine,

to beautify the place of my sanctuary;

and I will make the place of my feet glorious.

Remarkable in the Song is the discretion of Jerusalem. Only incidental references pertain, in the allusion to the tower of David (4:4), the city of Solomon's wedding (3:11). No reference is made to the great city of symbolic tradition, the city at the centre of the world (Ezek 5:5-6; 35:12), the focus of prophetic hope (Jer 33; Ezek 38; 48:18; Isa 44:11; 52:1.2; Hag 2:9; Zech 2:4,5) and of eschatological transformation (Isa 60-61; Rev 21:1f). Rather, Jerusalem is eclipsed behind a city without a name, the city of the narratives (3:1-4; 5:7) which is at best indifferent, at worst hostile to the lovers.

Jerusalem nevertheless has an important functional role. Indeed its presence is surprisingly pervasive thanks to the daughters of Jerusalem to whom are related the events of love. In this way it becomes a kind of redactorial centre, just as the garden is the symbolic centre and the beloved herself the focus of the Song. Though the Song depends entirely on movement - on the dialogue between the lovers, on the movement inside and outside, on flashbacks and *déjà vu* - it is nevertheless powerfully centrifugal, tending at different levels and to different

degrees to focus upon the beloved, the garden and Jerusalem in order to explore a single theme, love.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

The thesis begins with a translation of the text of the Song and a discussion of the meaning of difficult words and phrases and of textual cruxes. The translation does not aim to be authoritative, but is intended both to mirror and to test the conclusions of the thesis. The headings are purely functional, identifying the broad changes of scene and speaker, and should not be taken as implying adherence to any theory of the Song's provenance or structure. Indeed, the thesis' main concern is to eschew such theories which are nearly always dependent on factors outside the Song. Rather, the unity of the Song is in its language, and especially in its poetic imagery by means of which the lovers learn love's language, speak with one voice.

Some space was then devoted to outlining, as I see them, the weaknesses of previous approaches to the Song, allegorical, historical, dramatic, cultic and structuralist. It would be unfair to suggest that all or any of them is wrong or lacks value, especially as my indebtedness to a good number of them is evident throughout the thesis. It is simply that I wanted to try another approach which is not based, as most of them are, on an analysis of form and structure but on language. I do not wish to be bound by even the loosest of these theories, that the Song is a simple anthology of love poems, because that would mean deciding how many poems there are and where each begins and ends. I have expressed no firm opinion either about the Song's date.

The core of the thesis is taken up with an analysis and classification of the images and the way in which they relate to each other to supply 'movement' to the whole. But the movement is not of plot or narrative, nor of liturgy or drama; rather we listen in to snatches of the lovers' conversation as they praise each other. It is their fluctuating feelings and moods which dominate and it is the language they use and especially the images which express their emotions. Any unity, therefore, I would argue is psychological, centred on what the lovers feel, not on what they do. The end result is not a story about two lovers, but a meditation on what it means to be in love.

The images are divided for convenience into three broad categories; courtly imagery, imagery drawn from family life, and nature imagery (including, in the last, a little mythological imagery). What I have called the 'movement' of the Song is discussed in the final chapter, entitled 'Images in Time and Space'.

From such an analysis several conclusions emerge. First of all it must be underlined that the great variety of images seeks to express the recurring themes of seeking and finding, longing and fulfilment which mirror the alternating absence and presence of the loved one. A host of images is required also in the impossible task of expressing the incomparable beauty of the loved one. No single image is adequate to the task. Thus it is that images from a variety of milieux, from the natural world, from family life and even from a courtly setting are called upon.

On the other hand a high degree of homogeneity as regards these images reflects the growing communion of the lovers. Fox (1985) identifies certain associative sequences and repetends which constitute the major articulations of the Song, creating caesuras of greater or lesser weight. No less important are the repeated motifs and images which continually combine with new elements, drawing them into their sphere of influence. These repeated words and phrases appear on the lips of one lover and then the other, in such a way as to express the process by means of which the two lovers become one. They are essential to the closely woven tapestry by means of which the relationship is explored. As such, they are essential to its unity.

Particular images are important to the centring of the Song, for not only is the unity of the Song psychological but it is firmly grounded in the subjectivity of the beloved from whose viewpoint most of the Song is sung. She has the first and the last word, both of them imperatives addressed to her lover (וְיָשָׁב, 1:2; וְיָשָׁב, 8:14). Although the Song depends to a great extent on movement - on the dialogue between the lovers, on his movement to and from her door and on the fragility of temporal and spatial relationships - nevertheless it is powerfully centrifugal, focused upon the beloved and the image of the garden which symbolically represents her. To this garden, her lover comes to eat (5:1) for she is both the place and the means of his return to a paradise urgently sought after. In this centring process the daughters of Jerusalem are of great importance, for they make Jerusalem the redactorial centre of the Song. It is in Jerusalem that the dialogue comes alive by being related to them.

Other images are important to the movement of the Song and to its culmination in the climatic statement, again spoken by the beloved, that love is strong as death (8:6). These are the images of kingship, and of wealth and splendour, which are used to express the loved one's incomparability, only to be denounced at the last minute (8:7,11-12). The limits of metaphor are thereby laid bare. Water imagery, which is the subject of the illustrations, also participates in this process of reversal. Water accompanies and anticipates the growth of love, only to be set against love in the final verses as a foil which reveals its power (8:6).

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